

“THE SHAME OF OUR COMMUNITY”: AUTHORS’ VIEWS OF PROSTITUTES IN
LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

A Thesis

by

SHANNON ELAYNE GILLARD

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2004

Major Subject: History

“THE SHAME OF OUR COMMUNITY”: AUTHORS’ VIEWS OF PROSTITUTES IN
LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

A Thesis

by

SHANNON ELAYNE GILLARD

Submitted to Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Approved as to style and content by:

James Rosenheim
(Chair of Committee)

April Hatfield
(Member)

Mary Ann O’Farrell
(Member)

Walter Buenger
(Head of Department)

August 2004

Major Subject: History

ABSTRACT

“The Shame of Our Community”: Authors’ Views of Prostitutes in Late Eighteenth
Century England. (August 2004)

Shannon Elayne Gillard, B.A., McNeese State University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. James Rosenheim

This thesis attempts to identify authors’ attitudes toward late eighteenth century London prostitutes. Through the examination of several selected sources, one can isolate feelings that eighteenth century writers had about prostitution and those who practiced it. In these works, prostitutes were always rendered as of the lower orders, which the authors acknowledged and emphasized in their writings. What is striking is that none of these authors acknowledged the culpability of the male in the client-prostitute relationship. Therefore, in a close examination of eighteenth century authors’ views of prostitutes, one can find both classist and sexist attitudes. The incorrect formulation of the situation is ironic, given that most of the writers of such works were attempting to reform English society and devalue the debauchery and lust that prostitution represented to them.

The thesis begins by providing historical background of the lives of prostitutes in late eighteenth century England, showing that the prostitutes provided services to men of higher social and economic classes than they were, and were often young and economically disadvantaged. The main textual chapters are divided into three sections: the first examines works directly related to the Magdalen Charity for repentant prostitutes, namely sermons and titles written to govern or establish the charity, and finds that the authors of these works viewed the prostitute as someone who needed to be

instructed in the correct ways to live her life. The second analyzes short works written to address what their writers saw as the problem of prostitution, and discovers that although these writers found different reasons for the causes of prostitution, they all agreed that prostitutes debased society and needed to reform so that the nation would not be ruined. The third researches works of fiction and advice literature, and determines that although women in these works were presented as wealthier than actual prostitutes were, they nonetheless were of the lower orders and should protect themselves from clever and seductive men. The conclusion emphasizes the ways that this study provides new insight into the problem of prostitution and how that relates to race and class in modern society.

To all of my teachers, from before kindergarten through graduate school, those who were formally trained and those who were untrained but divinely inspired. This is especially dedicated to Dr. Tom Fox, whose western civilization courses encouraged me to major in history in the first place, and who passed away before I could share with him the completed fruits of my labor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began life as a graduate student at Texas A&M University as a student of Soviet Russian history. I performed my undergraduate work at a relatively small university in southwestern Louisiana, where I was the pupil of an expert faculty that was unfortunately limited in resources of all sorts. Texas A&M is much larger; I was to come here, learn the Russian language, earn a Master of Arts degree in Soviet history and, hopefully, go on to study at an even more prestigious school for the Doctor of Philosophy degree. That was the plan, at least, when I enrolled here in August 2001. As fate would have it, I found that I did not exactly fit in with the Soviet program at Texas A&M and sought another subject to study for my Master of Arts. I have been interested in British history for nearly as long as I have been interested in Soviet history and saw modern Britain as my next possibility. After several meetings with our resident modern British historian, the exquisite R. J. Q. Adams, I found that there were not too many subjects that appealed to me within modern Britain that scholars who have come before me had not already covered excellently. In my second semester, I took a course with Dr. Jim Rosenheim on eighteenth century society and culture and was smitten with the eighteenth century. I spoke with Dr. Rosenheim, who suggested that I “go to the sources” to find something that interested me. Therefore, during the summer of 2002, I looked through the Sterling Evans library’s index of the *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection to find interesting and obscure sources within our holdings. I found *Harris’s List of Covent Garden Ladies*, a source that was a guide to London prostitutes, and, just like that, a new research project was born. It would take many more hours of research and writing to formulate a coherent thesis, but I am quite proud of the final version.

In the formulation of scholarly ideas, we are always assisted by others. Fortunately for me, I assembled the best graduate committee ever to convene on the campus of Texas A&M University. Jim Rosenheim, the chair of that committee, has been patient and understanding well beyond the normal human threshold for either. His knowledge and guidance has helped me a great deal not only as I wrote the thesis, but also as I navigated the graduate program. April Hatfield, the other historian of the committee, has provided incalculable helpful observations and original ideas that have aided me in the process of writing and completing such a large, capstone work as this. She also encouraged my thought process and worked with me in an independent studies course that gave rise to many of the thoughts that are included in this thesis. Mary Ann O'Farrell, professor of English and outside the department member of the committee, has also given me much information to consider as I wrote.

Other people were not members of my graduate committee, but still provided much in the way of intellectual support. Robert Resch, whose course on "Class, Gender and Race in a Theoretical and Historical Perspective" opened my mind in many ways and forced me to consider several points-of-view in life and in the historical process, is an excellent example of what I would like to become as a person and scholar--more intelligent than anyone else around, yet humble enough not to show it. Dale Baum, for whom I worked as a teaching assistant, is the epitome of honesty and sincerity. Observing and working with him gave me the courage to maintain my sanity and to pursue life without hesitation. Brian Stagner has been most important with keen insights and motivational observations that have enabled me to complete this thesis at all.

Though I claim the influence and friendship of each of these individuals, their impact does not extend to any erroneous claims or faulty structures within this work.

Any instances of either are completely and totally my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Notes	6
II THE MAGDALEN HOSPITAL.....	8
Documents Related to the Magdalen Hospital	8
Sermons Delivered in the Magdalen Hospital Chapel.....	21
Notes	39
III PROSTITUTION AS PROBLEM.....	43
Notes	54
IV PRESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE	56
Notes	69
V CONCLUSION	72
Notes	76
REFERENCES	78
VITA.....	83

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Eighteenth century England and its capital, London, were a nation and city in flux.¹ Conditions were sometimes squalid; medicine and hygiene were primitive by today's standards. London was a center of trade and was home to the businesses of an emerging merchant class. The eighteenth century was a period in which men and women of lower orders vocally and physically expressed themselves and frequently did away with any deference that was expected of them.² Although "limited access to upward mobility and the rise in tandem of aggregate wealth and social pretensions ensured that the social order neither collapsed nor was overthrown," as historian Roy Porter wrote, those at the top of the social order were nonetheless worried about imitation of them by their perceived inferiors.³

Although these concerns figured prominently in discussions of what the higher orders saw as the dangerous tendencies of their contemporary world, there were other, more serious ones to consider. As we will soon see at length, another source of anxiety for elites was the urban prostitute who plied her trade in London. The prostitute potentially represented all that was wrong with eighteenth century London: she was a single woman and did not belong to any one man; she was vulgar; she dressed in a manner not appropriate to her social class; she lured men away from their pressing concerns of work and family. Because she held the possibility of so much debauchery, her existence did not escape the attention of some eighteenth century authors. These

This thesis follows the style and format of the *American Historical Review*.

writers, some of whom we will consider in this work, wanted to expose prostitution and its agent, the prostitute, as a corruptor of the nation. Because they saw prostitution as a source of depravity, they wanted to reform the prostitute and her behavior. When they discussed this reformation, however, they talked of the prostitute not in terms of her sexuality, but rather in terms of her class and economic standing. To change the practice of prostitution in England, then, the prostitute needed to be changed from someone who strained the economic system of England into a productive member of it. In their discussion, the authors revealed their class biases against the laboring poor. These writers also did not consider reforming the men who went to the prostitutes, although their patronage of these women ensured prostitution's continuing practice.

Because London was such a magnet, it drew a large contingent of all types of people, and prostitutes were no exception. What research has been done on the lives of late eighteenth century prostitutes shows that during this time, many of them were "born into the poorest sections of the community" and "acquired few skills while growing up that would allow them to escape that poverty."⁴ Indeed, "most of the capital's prostitutes [who entered the historical record] were born into relative poverty ... if not outright pauperism."⁵ The majority of prostitutes did not practice their trade for very long, or even continuously. They turned to prostitution to supplement their income in unfavorable economic times, and may even have combined the money earned with funds from charity and parish relief.⁶ When we look at the amounts that prostitutes charged, we can infer what types of clients they served. Arnold Harvey found that the common streetwalker charged for her services "a day's wages for the lowest-paid workers in the

eighteenth century.”⁷ Thus, it stands to reason that the men who paid these women to have sex with them were often of a socio-economic class higher than the women were. Men of the prostitute’s class could not easily afford her services. The exact amount of money that prostitutes earned is difficult to assess, because so many factors influenced it. In addition, there are accounts of prostitutes who received goods-in-kind for their services, which complicate this matter further.⁸ Nonetheless, they did not get rich.

Prostitutes were young, but not children. In the early years of the nineteenth century, the average age of applicants to the Magdalen House, a charity for repentant prostitutes that we will discuss shortly, was between seventeen and eighteen years.⁹ Prostitutes were at risk for the various health concerns that corresponded to the behaviors they practiced. The prostitutes often did not take measures that would have protected them from pregnancy or venereal disease, because in the eighteenth century the common view was that prostitution rendered women barren.¹⁰ Perhaps because of this, contemporaries believed that a prostitute’s career could last five years at the most, and it was generally believed that the prostitute would end her career in death.¹¹

Several historians have examined issues related to women, prostitutes and society in eighteenth century England. In his book *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*, and the dissertation that the book is based upon, Tony Henderson attempts to re-create the lives of London’s common streetwalkers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Henderson’s findings, that the average non-courtesan prostitute was born into a poor family and lacked the resources required to escape that life, and that prostitutes often worked

together in pairs, rather than in bawdy houses, inform the background of the present work. Henderson also finds that prostitution did not expand with the city of London, but instead remained in those areas of the city with cheap lodging and a large number of potential clients.

Randolph Trumbach's *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* also concerns itself with prostitution.

Trumbach's ultimate goal is to prove that male clients' eagerness to have sexual relations with prostitutes was a way for these men to prove their heterosexuality.

Trumbach's research on prostitution finds, like Henderson's, that women who were prostitutes were so because of economic necessity.

By contrast with Henderson and Trumbach, this study focuses neither on the life experience of the prostitute nor on the possible reasons her clients purchased her services. Instead, it seeks to isolate how authors' estimation of prostitutes and prostitution reflected class-based views both of the economically unfortunate and of women in general. Through an examination of different types of literature about prostitutes, the reader finds that although authors had their separate reasons for being concerned with prostitution, they nonetheless focused their attention upon the women who worked as prostitutes. Facts not included in these works were the economic conditions that forced these women into prostitution or the men who paid them and, for lack of a better phrase, kept them in business.

All of the sources that I examine will be from the later half of the eighteenth century. I do this because as Thomas Laqueur argued in his book, *Making Sex: Body*

and Gender from the Greeks to Freud, a shift in how people viewed the differences between the sexes occurred during this time. Before this period, in England and elsewhere a “one-sex model,” prevailed, based on the idea that men and women possessed the same sex organs, only one was inverted and the other not. After about the middle of the eighteenth century, however, this view lost its currency and men and women came to be seen as possessing different bodies and different sex organs.¹² This new perception of difference affected various aspects of eighteenth century lives. Understanding this idea, men and women separated their activities and concerns into separate, gender-based spheres. This separation is important to our study because the shift in sex models changed how society viewed prostitutes as well. Rather than being sexually insatiable beasts, women came to be seen as demure and needing protection. This gendered separation will figure largely, though unacknowledged and in the background, of the present study because it is an important factor in the establishment of the Magdalen Charity for Repentant Prostitutes in 1758. This was a charity that sought to teach prostitutes how to behave as a woman should—not as a prostitute with no morals, but as a homemaker and wife.

I have grouped the primary materials used in this study into three sections. The first, Chapter II, consists of documents relating directly to the Magdalen Hospital—namely plans to establish the charity, the Hospital’s *Rules, Orders and Regulations*, and sermons delivered in the Charity’s chapel. The majority of these works were concerned with ensuring that the prostitute became an industrious and pious woman at the conclusion of her time in the Magdalen Hospital. The third chapter covers works that

describe prostitution as a problem of society. The authors of these short titles saw the debasing of society by prostitutes as their main concern. Finally, the fourth chapter details how what I have termed prescriptive literature—works that sought to teach their readers correct behavior, either through fictional stories or advice—talked of prostitutes and their lives. These works showed the disastrous results that could ensue if women were not careful and did not protect themselves from clever and seductive men. Each of these sources used specific language, that is, language that painted the prostitute in ways that would be accessible to their audiences, and that revealed attitudes about prostitutes and their class status.

In each of the titles that we will study, whether they are sermons or fiction, pamphlets or plans to establish a charity for repentant prostitutes, we will see the ways that the authors' treatment of prostitutes revealed their biases.

Notes

¹For these summary remarks about London life in the eighteenth century, I rely on Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1982) and Richard B. Schwartz, *Daily Life in Johnson's London* (Madison, 1983).

²Schwartz, *Daily Life*, 168.

³Porter, *English Society*, 102 and 112.

⁴A. R. Henderson, "Female Prostitution in London, 1730-1830," Ph.D. Diss., London University, 1992, 35.

⁵Henderson, "Female Prostitution," 55.

⁶Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*, (London, 1999), 16.

⁷Arnold D. Harvey, *Sex in Georgian England: Attitudes and Prejudices from the 1720s to the 1820s* (New York, 1994), 89.

⁸Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 36.

⁹Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 22.

¹⁰Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 42.

¹¹Henderson, "Female Prostitution," 90.

¹²Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Cambridge, 1992), 19-20.

CHAPTER II

THE MAGDALEN HOSPITAL

Documents Related to the Magdalen Hospital

In 1758, the Magdalen Charity for Repentant Prostitutes opened its doors to all women who had worked in that profession and wanted to work toward a more productive life. Before the charity opened, several authors wrote works about what they thought the charity should be. Because these works dealt expressly with prostitution and the Magdalen Charity, the reader was able to glean these authors' understandings and perceptions of prostitutes. Though there are some works like these that detail the workings of the institution, some documents no longer exist. The majority of the official records, such as how many women came through the charity, who they were, how long they stayed, etc., have perished, as bombing in World War II apparently destroyed them.¹ One position pervaded the documents that dealt with the Magdalen Charity, whether they were about the establishment of the charity or the rules by which the women of the establishment were to live: the primary function of the charity was to make its wards into industrious, working women. The assumption that the women were not already so implied that the women did not have the desire, drive or skills to find employment in anything other than prostitution before they entered the Magdalen Charity. The charity existed to teach these women knowledge about employment, and most of the works written about the establishment of the charity expressed this main point, among others. The literature that dealt directly with the Magdalen Charity in every case emphasized the fact that the women who entered this institution were socially

and economically inferior to those men who had established and who presided over the charity. These superior men established the Charity to teach the repentant prostitutes necessary facts for the women's future survival. What these works also confessed, if implicitly, was that prostitution was not considered "work." The prostitute's practice of her trade netted her a profit of some sort, but this never entered into the discussion about the repentant prostitute. The authors also did not acknowledge the absence of gainful employment for single women—a factor in the women's becoming prostitutes. Both of these tacit arguments, and their more obvious, stated counterparts, refused to confront reality: many prostitutes became so because of economic necessity, and were only able to remain prostitutes if there were customers paying them. These sources stay silent on the subject of the clients' roles in the continuation of prostitution; instead, the sources maintain focus on the prostitutes themselves.

Even men who professed sympathetic feelings to the cause of the Charity were not above ignoring the prostitute's true economic and social conditions. Two philanthropists, Jonas Hanway and Robert Dingley were largely responsible for the Magdalen Hospital's establishment. Both became wealthy from the Russian fur trade, and Hanway was a director of the Bank of England.² In June 1758, Hanway published *A Plan for Establishing a Charity-House or Charity-Houses, For the Reception of Repenting Prostitutes. To Be Called the Magdalen Charity* and addressed it specifically to Dingley and the "Society for Establishing the Magdalen Charity." The majority of this text eventually became the *Rules Orders and Regulations of the Magdalen Charity*. What was exclusive to this work was Hanway's long introduction that contained his

many observations about prostitution and its history, from ancient Rome to contemporary England. Hanway wrote,

The more I think of the objects of your [Dingley and the Society for Establishing the Magdalen Charity] charity, the more I am convinced of the propriety of your design; and the more zealous I am to promote it. ‘The price of a good woman is indeed beyond gold;’ *one* sensible modest girl is worth *fifty* foolish vicious ones: it will therefore be a glorious task to cooperate with heaven, as far as blind and indigent mortals can imitate their Maker, in a work of *creation* as well as *redemption*; that is, in making *bad* women into *good* ones, and by their goodness to render them happy!³

The “glorious task” before the charity was to turn “foolish vicious” women, that is, silly and vice-addicted⁴ ones, into “good” and “modest” ones. This was an honor for Hanway to promote, as it was in league with religious demands, “as far as blind and indigent mortals can imitate their Maker.” Hanway used the term “indigent” to compare mortals to God, and said, “a good woman is indeed beyond gold.” Hanway described himself as an “indigent” mortal, as compared to God, but in reality, the women who came to the Magdalen Hospital were indigent compared to Hanway. His use of “indigent” to describe himself was subtly ironic. Hanway placed his idea of society on a scale of wealth. Presumably, once the women graduated from the charity, their social worth as respectable women increased. Would Hanway have seen these women who were economically indigent when they entered the charity as being worth gold? We cannot tell for certain, but it is unlikely that Hanway, given his idea that “one sensible modest girl is worth fifty foolish vicious ones,” would truly have equated the worth of a low-income woman who repented of prostitution with that of a woman whose family was historically wealthy.

In addition, in this passage, Hanway wanted to do more than save the repentant prostitutes: he wanted to make “bad women into good ones, and by their goodness to render them happy!” Hanway thus assumed that the prostitutes were intrinsically bad. Their time at the Magdalen Hospital would change that, though, and the women would become happy as a result. Hanway, who a few sentences before declared himself “indigent” compared to God, now declared that this Charity, of which he was a part, would re-make penitent prostitutes. He and others in control of the Magdalen Charity were in a position to completely change these women’s lives, if not in a God-like fashion, then in a comparable mortal style.

Hanway wanted to establish the Magdalen Charity because “sin” and “vice” were corrupting society. Rather than expressly stating “sex and promiscuity,” Hanway continued to use “sin and vice” to refer to them throughout his *Plans*, although behaviors related to prostitution were all that he mentioned in this work. He wrote,

Vice is now become so cheap, and the spirit of modesty at so low an ebb, among the common people, that it is hard to say how far these acts of uncleanness may be carried; nor what mischiefs they may produce. ... Let us then try if we can prevent, at least some of the calamitous effects of this excess, in which both the sexes, and the virtuous as well as the vicious, are too frequently involved. It seems to be acknowledged, that the common people, inhabitants of London, are more abandoned than their fore-fathers were; and among the higher classes many refinements in vice, and methods of carrying on the trade of lust, are introduced, to which our ancestors were strangers.⁵

Hanway said that because vice and immodesty were rampant “among the common people,” it was only a matter of time before their reprehensible behaviors spread to all areas of society. Because “it is hard to say how far these acts of uncleanness may be carried; nor what mischiefs they may produce,” establishing the Magdalen Charity was a

proper move to protect not just the society of “the common people,” but also the society of those better off socially and economically. Hanway did acknowledge that members of the “higher classes” were not exempt from vice either, but the place to act was with the “common people” and not these “higher classes.” Hanway also wrote that if prostitutes were “left to prey on the *unwary*, it is equally certain that they will propagate iniquity and spread disease through a great part of both the sexes, perhaps a *much greater* part than is generally imagined.”⁶ They, the non-aristocratic people who were addicted to vice (i.e. “vicious”) were “more abandoned than their fore-fathers were” and “introduced” these “refinements in vice” to “the higher classes.” Hanway’s (and others’) interference on behalf of the common people, to change their sinful ways, reinforced his and his associates’ superiority—not just socially, but morally as well. They could remake the women from “bad” into “good” and could change their perceived amoral habits.

Hanway spoke not only of two codes of behavior for wealthy and indigent society in general, but also for women of both the “common” and “higher” classes. Hanway wrote,

How many men are engaged by *promises*, or by *words* that were understood as *promises* which they do not regard? The offers which are too commonly made to transport the deluded *fair* from *want*, confinement and restraint of passions to liberty, gaiety and joy, are temptations which really deserve compassion. When women of education, who are supposed to be the guardians of their own honor, trespass, it is the greater shame; but the *poor* and *ignorant* are less guarded against such formidable seducers.⁷

Men did not put much faith in promises or words, Hanway wrote, but the “deluded fair,” that was to say, women, were incapable of making such distinctions. Hanway’s

comment implied that all women were vulnerable to seduction attempts. “Women of education,” however, were “guardians of their own honor” and when they were seduced, “it [was] the greater shame,” presumably because their knowledge enabled their ability to detect a rake. Conversely, the “poor and ignorant [were] less guarded against such formidable seducers.” Therefore, the “poor and ignorant” were far more likely to be seduced, and consequently, more likely to become prostitutes. Because women, whether educated or not, innocently believed in promises made to them, honorable men such as Hanway and his fellow supporters of the Magdalen Hospital needed to protect and re-make them.

Given that all women were potential targets for seduction by a rake, Hanway remarked that seduction was the general cause of prostitution. He wrote, “It is too well known, that this is the case with most of the prostitutes in their several degrees, from those pampered in private stews, down to the common dregs infesting our streets; and that the greater part of them, having once taken to this dreadful way of life, afterwards seek[s] diseases and an early death, through mere necessity.”⁸ Although all prostitutes were of low status in his own estimation, Hanway nonetheless made distinctions between high- and low-end prostitutes. The class distinctions made in their pre-prostitution lives remained. High-end prostitutes were “pampered in private stews,” while low-end prostitutes were “common dregs infesting our streets.” As in the sermons delivered in the Magdalen Hospital chapel that will be discussed in the next section, in Hanway’s *Plan*, the verb “infest” was also used to describe the common prostitute, and its inclusion in this description of her forced the reader to associate prostitutes with

disease and filth. Hanway used the term “infest” to apply only to the common prostitutes, however, and not the “pampered” ones. This is a notable difference that suggested Hanway’s inclination to make distinctions of inferiority from superiority even within given social groups.

The Magdalen Charity had benefits that exceeded simply enabling the repentant prostitutes to leave the profession of prostitution. Hanway wrote that the charity’s added benefit was to teach the poor working skills:

If the *vicious poor* were oftener chastised, and *compelled to work*, agreeably to the great order of providence; and if the *virtuous poor* were *timely* relieved, though in a moderate degree; if a constant *attendance* were given, and a greater extension of skill *shown* in the economy of *parish* affairs, we should not find such vast sums expended, seemingly in vain. There would not be such *enormous* sums devoted to charitable purposes, and yet our streets, abounding with objects, who are a *shame* to government and a *disgrace* to human nature.⁹

The “vicious poor” must be “compelled” to work, Hanway said, while the “virtuous poor” should be rewarded with small sums. If the “vicious” were not given a large amount of money, then, Hanway said, parishes would not spend so much relieving the poor. The “vicious poor” did not see any consequences for their actions, Hanway implied, and therefore had no reason to change their behavior. They continued to be profligate, and had too many illegitimate children whom the government and the parish had to support. The “virtuous poor,” conversely, exhibited proper care in the conduct of their lives and should receive at least a fraction of the funds spent on the maintenance of the “vicious poor” and their offspring. Hanway saw the Magdalen Charity, then, as an institution that provided the “vicious poor” a means of learning skills that enabled them to become “virtuous poor.” Thus, not only is the Magdalen charity to benefit prostitutes,

but it is also to benefit the poor who cannot otherwise learn any job skills. Once they, as daughters, sisters, and friends, entered the charity and learned how to perform various forms of work, these women on their departure were able to educate their peers and lift an entire class out of poverty and into better days—an ambitious plan, to say the least. Founding the Magdalen Hospital was a preventative measure. Hanway wrote that if reformers helped these women then there would be less reason to give them funds in the future because they would have learned to conduct themselves in a satisfactory manner. Hanway expressly stated this view two pages later when he wrote “we shall give others a *habit* of industry, as well as an opportunity of reforming their morals: and thus we may rescue them from perdition.”¹⁰

Having been established in 1758 with goals of social improvement in mind, in 1760 the charity published its *Rules, Orders and Regulations*. In addition to establishing the governing body of the “Magdalen House,” including a president, four vice presidents, secretary and treasurer among other offices, the *Rules* listed what was acceptable behavior for the women it accepted, what their lives in the Magdalen Hospital would be like, and other general considerations. In the Introduction, an unknown author wrote,

It is obvious to every mind ... that there cannot be greater objects of compassion, than poor, young, thoughtless females ... plunged into ruin by those temptations, to which their very youth, and personal advantages expose them. ... Surrounded by ... snares laid by those endowed with superior faculties ... what virtue can be proof against such formidable seducers, who offer too commonly, and too profusely promise, to transport the thoughtless girls from want, confinement, and restraint of passions, to luxury, liberty, gaiety, and joy?¹¹

The penitent prostitute was described again as “poor,” which we have discussed previously. She was also described as “young” and “thoughtless,” in this estimation, and these traits were responsible for her being lured into prostitution. She believed promises of deliverance “from want, confinement and restraint of passions to liberty, gaiety, and joy.” This view of the penitent prostitute, while it described her as “poor,” then said that she began work as a prostitute for the adventure and romance of it. This paragraph was similar to Hanway’s writings, but there was a new element involved in the Introduction that was absent from Hanway: the mentally and physically superior seducer. Whereas the seducer was an abstract man in Hanway’s estimation, in this Introduction, he was “endowed with superior faculties” and had the resources to offer to “transport” the “thoughtless girls” to “luxury, liberty, gaiety, and joy.”

As this was the introduction to a printed version of the *Rules*, it was not improbable that this romanticized portrayal of the typical repentant prostitute was an element that the author added to increase the probability that readers would take the time to learn about the *Rules, Orders and Regulations* of the Magdalen Charity. An unthinking innocent girl who was promised better days was a more sympathetic portrait than the reality of women who turned to prostitution at different times in their lives because they needed the money. The reality of the financially needy prostitute who turned to sex for money as a means to support herself was a gloomy picture indeed. Additionally, this vision of a sympathetic prostitute provided the reader an image of a woman who was a less undesirable partner for her clients. Hanway had shown that the attitude expressed toward the “common dregs” was neither sympathetic nor

complimentary. However, as this Introduction showed, the prostitute was also a woman, and occasionally unable to withstand attention from a man “endowed with superior faculties.”

Within the *Rules*, we learn what administrators expected of the women who entered the Magdalen Charity. When they were admitted, if their clothes were “in any tolerable condition,” the garments were ticketed and saved to give to the women when they were discharged from the hospital. “But if such apparel is too fine for their station, the same may be sold, and the produce brought to their account.”¹² Shabby clothing was acceptable for the prostitutes who entered the Magdalen Hospital, but if their clothes were deemed too “fine for their station,” they were sold. Whether any women entered the Charity with these types of garments was unlikely, as the women probably would have already sold them for their monetary value. The fact that the possibility was nonetheless raised is an indication that the author of these *Rules* believed that some prostitutes who sought the aid of the Charity would not be destitute.

Finally, when it came to the women’s employment and potential future work, the Magdalen House had several rules. The first of these was that “each person is employed in such work or business as is suitable to her abilities, and may have such part of the benefit arising from her labor and ingenuity, as the committee shall judge her deserving....”¹³ The committee looked at the woman’s behavior within the Charity and decided what work she was trained to perform. The occupations in which the women were employed consisted of many different types of clothing work, including lace and embroidery.¹⁴ The goods that the women made were sold quickly “that they may know

how their property accumulates, as an additional spur to industry.”¹⁵ This statement indicated that the women were foolish or ignorant and did not understand the process by which they could insure an income. This also ignored the fact that the prostitutes had earned money as prostitutes. They knew how capital accumulated; the administrators did not consider this previously earned money as income. The administrators’ refusal to acknowledge this fact was an example of the reluctance to admit that men paid these women to have sex with them.

The trades that the wards of the Magdalen Hospital performed, especially those of making clothes and lace, were often associated with unrepentant prostitutes by other people not necessarily involved with the Magdalen Hospital. Most of the clothing trades were seen by contemporaries as “responsible for the introduction of a disproportionately large number of women to a career on the streets.”¹⁶ In fact, “In 1783, the writer Charles Horne warned parents against allowing their daughters to become milliners, mantua-makers (dress-makers), haberdashers and other ‘dealers in vanity’ as ‘actually seminaries of prostitution.’”¹⁷ There were two reasons for this belief. The first said that the low quality of working conditions, bad pay and trivial nature of the work rendered its practitioners susceptible to prostitution. The second said that these professions were increasingly filled by men and offered women little to no opportunities. Whether or not these presumptions were true, and their relationship to the drafting of prostitutes, cannot be adequately answered. One historian, however, examined a small group of women arrested for public vagrancy (because there were no specific laws against prostitution) and found that a high percentage of the women were employed in the clothing trades.¹⁸

It seems odd that the administrators of the charity trained the women to perform the trades from which prostitutes were recruited. The administrators in this case were not offering to make any real change for these women. If they were coming to the charity to escape prostitution and learn a new trade to make a better, more worthwhile living, then one would assume that the administrators would train these women to perform tasks that were not associated with prostitution. But there were few professions available to women that did not have the taint of the potential for prostitution, since servants, one of the other occupations available for single women, were often also seen as vulnerable. Other than these trades, there were not many occupations open to women in late eighteenth century England.¹⁹ Perhaps, then, the aim of the Charity was too high; all occupations open to unmarried women of any of the classes of English society were associated with prostitution. Unmarried women with financially solvent families were able to live off family income, but no such opportunity existed for unmarried lower class women.²⁰ At any rate, the charity did not recognize this discrepancy. The administrators' inability to recognize that the economic situation for unmarried women was so dire was another example of their blindness to the lives of the lower orders.

The charity certainly thought itself successful, claiming that a good percentage of its women went on to "respectable employment."²¹ As historians have noted, though, this was not necessarily due to the intervention of the charity, as the women's "time as prostitutes was often interrupted by the return to service or other work, for prostitution was for the majority perhaps merely one means among many of earning a subsistence."²² This was a direct contradiction of many eighteenth century authors' renderings of

prostitutes. These authors saw them as entering into prostitution for life, and as a misguided “poor” woman who needed to be rescued from this life of vice. The truth was that economic conditions were such that some women worked only for a portion of their working lives as prostitutes because of the amount of money they could make in that trade. Depending on the amount of time the prostitute worked, the clients she served and the acts she was willing to perform, she could sometimes earn in one day what other occupations open to women would pay in a week.²³

Although it did not always view its mission or the women who came there in a realistic way, the Magdalen Charity for Repentant Prostitutes marked a departure from conventional wisdom of the time, as its supporters and administrators thought that it was possible to reform these sinful women. “The idea that fallen women could remake their characters and remold their lives, albeit with some philanthropic assistance, was a new one.”²⁴ Rather than condemning these women to a life of further destitution and disease, the charity’s supporters believed that “it would be possible to make these useless women into good citizens, to restore them to their proper roles as laborers, wives and mothers.”²⁵ Once this was accomplished, these women and, by extension, the supporters of the charity, could contribute to the greater glory of England.²⁶ This very insistence illustrated that the Charity’s administrators viewed their mission as a way to rescue the lower orders from themselves, and the administrators intended to do that by enforcing their values onto those less fortunate than they—the penitent prostitutes of the Magdalen Hospital. The establishment of the Charity and the values that it sought to instill in the repentant prostitutes were both created and enforced by the administrators because they

believed that they knew how to make the nation greater. Their actions were not altogether altruistic: if they could but teach the women who came into the charity how to behave in the fashion that they saw fit, they could save the whole of England—and they would be redeemers.

Sermons Delivered in the Magdalen Hospital Chapel

Perhaps naturally, because the charity was named after an important religious figure and dealt with the reformation of sinful behavior, the role of the clergyman was important in the Magdalen Hospital. On Sundays, anniversaries of the charity's founding and other similarly important dates, clergy delivered sermons to the women of the charity as well as the administrators and any visitors. On several occasions, the men who delivered the sermons published them, often at the behest of the charity's administrators. Clergy who published their sermons sometimes wrote about prostitutes in their writings. Because their audience included prostitutes, it was presumably logical for the men who preached in the chapel of the Magdalen Hospital to include the image of women fallen from grace and who sold their affections as part of their message. By and large, when clergy addressed prostitutes and their occupation in sermons, the ministers emphasized that these women needed to repent and become demure women, cognizant of their past sin and eager not to repeat it. However, given this hopeful approach, the clergy often described the state of the prostitute in disparaging and unpleasant terms. By the end of the eighteenth century, one clergyman contradicted this pattern and offered that the reason that these women turned to prostitution was because it had been glamorized. He said that the desire for material objects forced them to become

prostitutes to earn enough money to support their prospective lifestyle. Perhaps ironically, this very concern—that the wards of the Magdalen Hospital came there because they lived beyond their means—was one of the original objections to the charity that the first generation of clergy who preached in the Magdalen Hospital chapel were forced to answer.

William Dodd produced a majority of the Magdalen Hospital's published sermons. In 1776, Dodd published his version of the history and successes of the Magdalen Charity as a preface to a collection of five sermons that he delivered in the charity's chapel. This *Rise, Progress and Present State of the Magdalen Hospital for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes* was Dodd's assessment of the ways that the charity benefited the lives of its wards and their supporters. The women learned valuable skills that made them suitable for employment and reflected well on their backers. Essentially, Dodd said, the women learned to put their uncouth and despicable ways behind them. He wrote: "We see already many miserable fellow-creatures, by means of this happy Asylum [the Magdalen Charity], rescued from sorrow We see them restored to their God; to their parents; to their friends; to their country; to themselves; to health; to industry; to happiness!"²⁷ Dodd offered the women's behavior in chapel, where "they behave themselves with all imaginable propriety ... [with] decent and commendable deportment," as an indication of the distance from their wicked paths that the women advanced.²⁸ Dodd emphasized here the genteel behavior of the reformed women, as an indication of their rise from low class status. The implicit assumption was that the

women would not have acted so nicely in chapel if not for the intervention of the Magdalen Hospital.

Dodd even pointed to the members of the public there present as judges of this transformation. Administrators allowed the public into the Magdalen House on Sundays, and it became fashionable for elite men and women to attend services there and see the women of the charity for themselves. Even those of the highest social circles who normally never went near a charitable institution came to the Magdalen House because “it was continuously the object of malicious gossip.”²⁹ The charity was a curiosity for these wealthy individuals. It was a form of entertainment for them. These middling and upper class people viewed the women of the charity in a rather unsympathetic way. Horace Walpole, the fourth son of Sir Robert Walpole (chief minister to both George I and George II),³⁰ wrote of one such visit to the charity in a letter to George Montagu, an old friend from his school days at Eton.³¹ While the correspondence between the two friends was sometimes coded with private jokes and innuendo,³² Walpole’s comments on his visit to the charity were clear. Walpole jested to his friend that the “wands of the governors” of the charity “put me in mind of Jacob’s rods that he placed before the cattle to make them breed” and was proud that he did not ask “whether among the pensioners there were any *novices* from Mrs. Naylor’s.”³³ “Jacob’s rods” referred to Genesis 30:37-43, in which Jacob, to breed special strong animals, placed special rods before his cattle while they are in the mating season.³⁴ By saying that the “wands of the governors” were similar to those mentioned in the Bible passage about Jacob, Walpole made a crude joke at the expense of the women in the

Hospital. Jacob placed the rods before the cattle for the specific purpose of breeding better animals than his rival bred; in Walpole's estimation, the governors of the charity placed rods before the penitent prostitutes for the same purpose. His comment about Mrs. Naylor referred to Charlotte Alston Hare-Naylor, a woman whose "assemblies and morals" Walpole esteemed very little.³⁵ One can assume that this also was a joke at the expense of the penitent prostitutes of the Magdalen Hospital, and at the expense of Mrs. Naylor.

The people who came to the charity came to gawk at the Magdalens, and viewed them unsympathetically. In this example at least, this derision was at the expense of the women that the charity was supposed to help, and it was not extended to the men who patronized them before their enrollment in the charity. Walpole, in his letter, joked about the similarities between wands of the charity's governors and those used to breed cattle, which was humorous to him because it came at the expense of the prostitutes in the charity. What was not mentioned was that these women became prostitutes because they were poor, needed money and employed themselves in this way only because men paid willingly to have sex with them. It was possible that had he reflected upon the women's physical, emotional and economic states further, Walpole would not have found his remarks so humorous. This was unlikely, however, because elite eighteenth century society did not discuss the fact that men of their rank—or any social class—frequented the common prostitutes.

Though erroneously recorded in several sources as the chaplain of the Magdalen Hospital, William Dodd certainly wrote and published most of the Charity's surviving

sermons. In the chapel of the Magdalen House, on April 28, 1759, Dodd gave a sermon on John 8:7, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone,” meant to reassure the repentant prostitutes and the charity’s administrators alike that their cause was worthy and to ignore those who objected to its establishment.³⁶ When the sermon was published nearly 20 years later, Dodd attached a long preface that included observations about the charity, its women, and its administrators. These thoughts conformed to what one would expect—they praised the charity’s administrators and all similarly connected with the Magdalen Hospital, rather than applauding the women who entered the charity on their own. Dodd noted general objections that opponents of the charity raised—namely that an institution in the manner of the Magdalen Hospital was not warranted because not enough potentially repentant prostitutes existed, or, if they did, were so far removed from decent society that its aims were impossible. Dodd countered this argument and offered several revealing conclusions to prove these objectors wrong in their assumptions. This, basically, was the purpose of the work.

Dodd offered class-based views of the prostitutes of the Magdalen Hospital. Dodd’s words in this sermon indicated that the prostitute passed a most deplorable life, and existed in the most abhorrent of lifestyles. He illustrated this by remarking that “many capital streets, for many years past, have been thronged, and every corner of our metropolis infested by the miserable wretches, to the shame of good order, decency, and religion...”³⁷ The “miserable wretch” of the prostitute “infest[ed]” the city streets and her very existence disturbed the normal bounds of society. The charity will teach the women the “exactest knowledge of their characters”, traits that will make them “useful

and faithful wives ... For it is well known, that many of these unhappy women, who have once lost their character, have no possible opportunity to get their own bread, however able and desirous they may be...”³⁸ Once they fell from decent society, Dodd said here, these women did not function as typical women. The prostitutes wanted to acquire their own food of their own accord, but were unable.

Dodd’s assumption that becoming “useful and faithful wives” enabled these women to “get their own bread” was a class-based one. He placed the most emphasis on marriage; job skills alone were inadequate for these women to have been successful. As historian Bridget Hill has noted, during this time, no woman remained unmarried if she could help it. That is, unless she came from a wealthy family that could support her decision not to marry a man who would work to bring them both money for food and a family of their own.³⁹ Marriage to a man of her social class enabled the repentant prostitute to procure food, and it promoted the general social welfare. Dodd said that “one source” of “the great decrease of our people” was “that abominable lust, and prevalent promiscuous commerce of the sexes, which, to the prejudice of honorable matrimony, so notoriously abounds.”⁴⁰ Thus, the women were to learn to be good wives so that they could preserve marriage, and therefore, English society. The repentant prostitutes of the Magdalen Charity should work hard, leave the charity with enough knowledge and skill to gain both employment and a husband, Dodd intimated, or their entire future was at stake.

The wealthy supporters of the charity owned the most potentially beneficial tools for their society, Dodd said, because they possessed “noble minds” that “[we]re always

the most free from envy.”⁴¹ The next statement contrasted the nobility of great minds and great wealth, with “the malevolence of the lower sort” which could never understand an institution like the Magdalen Charity. This “lower sort,” Dodd continued, “may regret such a provision for their miserable, and by *them* judged, utterly unworthy fellow-creatures, but will never be able to prevent it.”⁴² Although elite men and women came to the charity to gawk at the prostitutes, Dodd believed that they understood the aims of the charity much better than any member of the low classes would. This is a testament to the class bias involved in the “rescuing” of prostitutes. Although some of the ranks of the wealthy “noble minds” established the charity, others of this same group patronized the prostitutes who ended up there and made jest of the condition of the women who lived in the Hospital. Yet, according to Dodd, it was the “lower sort” who could not comprehend the value of the charity. Would Dodd have included Horace Walpole among his estimation of the “lower sort”? It is highly unlikely. Why use a term as loaded as “lower sort” to describe those who do not support the charity? The use of this phrase implies a class-determined theme. The wealthy, “higher sort” was capable of understanding and supporting an institution such as the Magdalen Charity. The “lower sort” was not, because of their lack of compassion and intelligence.

Dodd further said that those who give aid to the charity were especially worthy of salvation because they saw the decency within the prostitutes, whereas “common and superficial observers” saw only the sin of the “common and pestilent prostitute.”⁴³ Both the inferior observer and the prostitute were “common” and linked in their inferiority. Authors writing about prostitution often used terms identified with disease and filth,

such as “pestilent,” to describe the prostitute’s nature and “infestation” to describe her effect on society. While contemporaries correlated prostitution with the spread of disease, venereal and otherwise, this characterization of the prostitute as a “pestilent” committing “infestation” implies more than a preoccupation with sickness. It implied a class distinction between the wealthy who were healthy and did not live in overcrowded neighborhoods and the lower orders who lived in cramped quarters. Thus, Dodd equated the prostitute with the lower orders’ worst conditions in this sermon, and expressed how wide the gap was between rich and poor. The wealthy who donated sums to the Magdalen Charity were not doing so because they wanted to help those of their social circle; they did so to help the “unpolished.”⁴⁴

Even when discussing how women became prostitutes, Dodd revealed his class prejudices, although he blamed seduction for women’s fall. After men seduced them, Dodd said, the women “f[e]ll lower and lower in the pit of soul misery, and drudge[d] in the labor of odious prostitution, to preserve a burthensome being from famine and death.”⁴⁵ While the phrasing “drudge in the labor of prostitution” ostensibly referred to the women who worked in the undesirable trade of selling sex with men for money, again Dodd’s word choice was quite interesting. Its implications illustrated Dodd’s correlation between prostitutes and the laboring poor. The relevance of these portrayals will become much useful later when we discuss fictional literature that dealt with prostitutes, because the fictional tales of prostitution will say the exact opposite. The fiction will depict prostitutes as financially fortunate young women who are seduced by elite men.

After emphasizing the difference between the supporters of the charity and the people whom it hoped to help, Dodd told his audience that the Magdalen Hospital was the most worthy of all because it was the duty of the Christian men assembled there to

save ... the souls of poor, abandoned, wretched fellow-Christians, who have no other resource, no other means of relief: It is to preserve ... the bodies of many young and perishing fellow creatures; it is to take from our streets the shame of our community, the instruments of foulest pollution, and most poisonous contagion: it is to restore to the state many useless members; and to introduce to health and to industry, to happiness and to heaven, many, who could otherwise neither ever have been employed, nor ever restored.⁴⁶

Again, Dodd associated the prostitute with filth and disease, when he called them “instruments of foulest pollution, and most poisonous contagion.” This time, however, Dodd added “poor” and “abandoned.” Poor has several connotations, from a condition of being economically disadvantaged to being in a pitiable state. In either case, this descriptive term clearly places the prostitute in a socially inferior position. Dodd implied here that the penitent prostitute was unable to make her own decisions and needed the administrators and contributors of the Magdalen Charity to support her. Likewise, “abandoned” has several meanings, including deserted as well as personally without, though none would place the prostitute on anything but the lowest level. Finally, in this selection, Dodd presented most clearly the prostitute as inferior socially to the administrators of the charity, when he described her as a “useless member” of the state who can be “introduced to health and to industry.” He wrote implicitly that the charity existed to be the agent through which the prostitute may learn the middling class traits of industry and piety. As E. P. Thompson noted, elites wanted to “[put] the houses of the poor in order,” by encouraging a work ethic and adherence to religion.⁴⁷ After she

successfully completed her time in the Magdalen Charity, the repentant prostitute no longer lived as a “useless member” of society who harmed everyone around her, but as a decent woman and potential wife. The administrators of the charity wanted to instill in their charges their value system. Dodd echoed these sentiments in his sermon on this occasion when he asked the audience to help rid the streets of “the shame of our community, the instruments of foulest pollution, and most poisonous contagion”—hardly compassionate terms for what he only sentences earlier called “fellow Christians.” Although the penitent prostitutes were supposed to be like the administrators and donors to the charity, as they were fellow creatures, they were not so similar that they were truly analogous. The elites in the authority needed to be reassured that they were superior so that they would be more inclined to support the Magdalen Charity.

In a sermon that Dodd gave in January 1760 within the Magdalen House chapel before Prince Edward, Duke of York and others, and the one that Horace Walpole heard on his visit to the Magdalen Hospital, Dodd took the gospel passage of Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost” for its basis. He began with a few paragraphs spoken directly to the Duke of York, but then addressed the charity’s wards. Dodd’s sermon on this occasion told the audience of the great benefits of the Magdalen Charity, namely the spiritual ones. In Dodd’s estimation, even these spiritual benefits occurred on a scale that ranked the women as inferior. Dodd told the women of the Hospital that they had an obligation to do their best because God rescued them, through the Charity. He encapsulated this sentiment when he told the charity’s wards in

the audience, “All you can do will seem mean and poor, in comparison of the good things you have received.”⁴⁸ Setting aside the use of “poor” to describe the repentant prostitutes, as we have already discussed that at length, it is worth noting the extent to which the women were instructed to feel inferior to the administrators of the charity. Their future works will pale in comparison with the goodness that they have received from the charity, hence the use of the word “mean,” used in this instance to indicate crudeness, to describe their possible future actions. The rest of the assembled congregation was not addressed in this way; only the penitent prostitutes. Dodd, in a few paragraphs later told the audience that the charity improved the women’s lives. He said that the Charity taught them to sing rather than solicit; to wear modest clothes rather than “garments of shame,” to be free of drunkenness, “and from heirs of eternal misery ... [to be] candidates for a kingdom of eternal glory.”⁴⁹ Whether the women solicited, wore “garments of shame” and drank to excess before they entered into the Magdalen Chapel we do not know, but Dodd characterizes all of them as having done so. He has to denigrate them to make the case that the charity has reformed them to such an extent that they do not behave in this manner any longer, and are therefore “candidates for a kingdom of eternal glory.”

The praise for the administrators and donors of the Magdalen Charity was a frequent subject of sermons given within the charity. A sermon Dodd gave in 1762 in the Magdalen chapel, centered around Job 29:11-13, also spoke of the Magdalen Hospital’s reforming mission and of the benefits of helping “the poor, the orphans and the unassisted.”⁵⁰ Dodd said,

It can be no surprise, that the benevolent man immediately acquires the warm approbation of the community. ... The higher his station, and the more extensive his influence, the more he studies to adorn that station, and to employ that influence ... he knows that the best prerogative of an exalted station, is to afford shelter to inferiors, who repose themselves under such cover and protection: he knows, that only by doing good, a man can truly enjoy the advantages of pre-eminence.⁵¹

While the scripture passage applies to all people, rich and poor, who help the less fortunate, Dodd used this sentiment to praise the wealthy and well connected. Here Dodd said that because those of “high station” and who aim to climb higher still want to better themselves, the best way to do that was to “afford shelter to inferiors.” This higher status helped that person to “enjoy the advantages of pre-eminence,” but it also widened the gap between the man of “high station” and the “inferiors.” The “inferiors” benefited from the upwardly mobile actions of those of “high station,” but those benefits were incidental to the process of the spiritual and social climber. Presumably, because their “adorn[ments] ... afford[ed] shelter to inferiors,” Dodd did not comment on the inappropriate nature of elites’ good works. One might expect a clergyman to reflect on Christ’s admonitions to help the poor as much as possible without seeking praise, but Dodd does not do so. As long as their support helped the Magdalen Charity, Dodd was not concerned with the intentions behind these actions.

Although William Dodd delivered many speeches in the chapel of the Magdalen Hospital, he was not its official chaplain. Jonathan Reeves held that position, and in October 1758, at the charity’s opening, he gave the sermon titled *The Lost Sheep Found*.⁵² This sermon looked at the familiar parable of the lost sheep, in which a shepherd who loses one sheep goes after it though the loss would have been but a little

expense to him. By using this passage as the basis for his sermon, Reeves identified the prostitute as the example of the sinful person whom Christ was sent to save and foreshadowed Dodd's later preoccupation with class distinctions.

Reeves described the lost sheep of the parable as "wandering it knows not whither, ignorant in which way to return to its fellows, and suffering the punishment of its folly in the hardships and misery of a desolate, starving and defenseless condition."⁵³ The life of the prostitute was comparable to that of this lost sheep, Reeves said, because she had removed herself from her previous company and relations. She had separated herself from all that she knew to pursue her life as a prostitute. She was therefore "ignorant" and "suffer[ed] the punishment" of her own decisions and thus obviously was not capable of being in charge of herself. She needed someone else to show her the way, and the Magdalen Charity was the place to do that. Reeves asked the penitent prostitutes assembled to recall their days of sin. "How nearly did you resemble the silly sheep in the parable, as to the folly of your choice; how far did you exceed all comparison in the guilt of it."⁵⁴ The prostitute was to blame for her condition; never mind the economic conditions that forced her into the practice or the men who paid her that kept her in it. Her guilt "exceed[ed] all comparison" and she was right to seek reform within the charity.

In an attempt to answer those who objected to the establishment of the charity on the ground that it would encourage, rather than discourage, vice and prostitution, Reeves reminded them that while Christ was friendly with sinners, the sinners did not represent Christ. That is, while Christ visited with unclean persons, he nonetheless was beyond

reproach. The Magdalen Hospital likewise aimed to help those already stained by the commission of sin, but they would not approve the sin of their Charity's recipients. Reeves said that "[Christ] was [sinners'] friend to convert and save them from their wickedness, not to encourage them in it."⁵⁵ By using this example, then, Reeves compared the administrators of the new charity with Christ himself and suggested that they did not encourage sin but, quite the contrary, saved women from further spiritual damnation. This posed a striking comparison, in that a deity represented the supervisors of the charity, while their charges were the sinners to whom he ministered. The gap could not be expressed any more clearly. Yes, Christ did minister to sinners; however, he was a divine being, so he could not be further from the sinners physically or spiritually. Reeves went a step further, and reminded the audience of the benefits extended to Mary Magdalen, the namesake of the charity and also a woman who overcame her sins and became one of Christ's most trusted disciples.⁵⁶ The women needed the Charity and its administrators to show them the correct way to conduct their lives; they were unable to do so for themselves. Mary Magdalen realized this, and so should the penitents in the Charity named for her, Reeves said.

Clergy other than the chaplain or the ubiquitous Dodd sometimes gave sermons in the chapel as well, even if few survive. In 1777, for example, Samuel Glasse preached a sermon in the chapel of the Magdalen Hospital at the annual meeting of the charity's governors. Glasse was a prominent London theologian; he was a chaplain in ordinary to George III, and wrote a 1786 work that recommended Sunday schools.⁵⁷ While the content of the sermon dealt with some of the themes that Dodd and Reeves

had developed, Glasse offered his perceptions of the women, the unseemly state of their physical and spiritual lives, and the Magdalen Charity. As may be expected, his sermon is full of congratulatory messages for those men who established and those who then ran the institution. However, he also discussed the physical and emotional states of the women whom the charity had rescued throughout its history. If the typical women who sought redemption at the Magdalen Hospital possessed signs of virtue, Glasse said, it would have been no question for the men of the Magdalen Charity to have done all in their power to have rescued them. Because the typical women did not hold any such characteristics, Glasse continued, the achievements of the Magdalen Charity were that much more commendable.

Glasse spoke extensively of the typical prostitutes' lack of restorable features. He said that the only thing that the administrators of the charity recognized was their "extreme necessity," their desperate conditions.⁵⁸ The prostitutes who came to the Magdalen Charity were completely devoid of any recommending characteristics. They did not embody any values that the administrators would recognize; they had only their desperate conditions to recommend them. The prostitute was so far removed from what the men who ran the Magdalen Charity were accustomed to seeing that she was an aberration. Glasse also used a reference that we recognize as familiar, when he said that the typical penitent prostitute had "hitherto been pestilential to society." Glasse said that every method should and would be used to rescue this typical woman from her life of sin.⁵⁹ Thus, Glasse too framed his discussion about prostitution in a way that emphasized the class inferiority of the prostitute. While he recognized that the prostitute

became so out of desperation, he stressed that the benevolence of the Magdalen Hospital was the harbinger of good in her life. The prostitute who came to the Magdalen Hospital to repent and cleanse herself of her sinful life was not recognized as equally important as the administrators of the charity in her own life. By failing to accord the penitent prostitute at least a share of the credit for her rescue, Glasse refused her the ability to act on her own behalf. Certainly the women who came to the charity did so willingly. Glasse did not give the women that satisfaction; instead, he attributed all of the praiseworthy features of the Magdalen Charity to the administrators. In this way, his class perception of repentant prostitutes was similar to those of the chaplain Reeves. Not only was this perception an elitist one, but it was sexist as well. Both men saved their highest praise not for the successful graduates of the Magdalen Charity, but for the men who established and oversaw the Charity.

William Bell Williams advocated a class-based view of the typical prostitute that was different from Dodd, Reeves and Glasse in a sermon he gave in the Magdalen Chapel in 1794. His sermon focused on the figure of Mary Magdalen and her life of sin and repentance. Williams said to his audience that the Charity's women should take Mary Magdalen's example: recognize and repent for their sins. Williams said that although Mary Magdalen had a distinct advantage because she accompanied Jesus and repented to him directly and in person, the charity's wards should not be discouraged, because Mary Magdalen's example was courageous and worthy of imitation.

In this sermon, Williams was concerned chiefly with the factors that contributed to the women's turn to prostitution. Presumably, he spoke of causes of prostitution to

this audience to warn any possible young women in the audience of the perils that awaited them if they pursued such a life; additionally, what he saw as causes of prostitution supported the elites' views of their society. Williams wrote:

If in the times of David, it was a question wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? Surely the enquiry—How shall a young female escape destruction?—may well be made, in these days of luxury and dissipation; when every varnish and false gloss is thrown over the hideous form of vice: when the press teems with *novel* works of licentiousness, and seduction is by some studied as a system of polite accomplishment, when by all, it should be abhorred as a crime of the blackest dye.⁶⁰

Williams anchored his discussion of the problem of prostitution in a class structure as some of the other clergy had, but it was a different class structure. Whereas Dodd, Reeves and Glasse located the problem of prostitution in the women's closeness to the poor and laboring classes, Williams found the root cause of prostitution "in these days of luxury and dissipation." The women who came to the Magdalen Charity were victims of a different set of economic circumstances—they responded to a "false gloss" that was "thrown over the hideous form of vice." Williams's view that the prostitute responded to the lure of a lifestyle that was beyond her means assumed that the rich standard of living was something that many wanted to emulate. This callously took for granted that the prostitute was a poor woman and that she wanted to imitate elites. While Dodd, Reeves and Glasse did not grant much agency to the typical prostitute, they did at least acknowledge that she came to the Magdalen Charity from poverty and desperate social and economic conditions. The typical prostitute did not turn to the practice as an exciting life for the adventure; she did so because she was desperate and in need of

money. The typical prostitute did not respond to “luxury” and “dissipation,” but a need for necessities.

Why did these sermons that were given in a chapel of a charity established for repenting prostitutes concern themselves so much with emphasizing the class status of the women within that charity? For many of the sermons, the prominence of the women’s pitiful state contrasts with the exalted state of the administrators and philanthropists who established and ran the charity. This social and economic gap certainly was real, but the importance placed on it is interesting because those present certainly knew of the disparity between the rich benefactors and the impoverished prostitutes. The wealthy and important were certainly interested in the Magdalen Hospital, and we have at least one contemporary account of a curious and jesting visit to the Magdalen Hospital chapel to “see” the women of the charity. As long as reforming focus was aimed at the women whom the charity hoped to help, there was less need for the middling and upper class men who patronized these women, and others like them, to face their own complicity in the institution of prostitution. The clergy who wrote and delivered these sermons were quick to point out the nobility of the cause of the charity, but never pointed out the possibility that the very men who sat in the Magdalen Hospital chapel, either as visitors or as administrators of the charity, could have been the clients of prostitutes, nor did they point to any man as the source of the prostitutes’ continuing plight. Instead, they tried to reform the women as much as possible and ignored men’s roles in the practice of prostitution.

Notes

¹Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago, 1998), 72.

²Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*, (London, 1999), 185.

³Jonas Hanway, *A Plan for Establishing a Charity-House or Charity-Houses for the Reception of Repenting Prostitutes*, (London, 1758), iv-v. (Italics are in the original.)

⁴*Oxford English Dictionary* Online entry for “vicious, a.” Definition 2.a.: “Of persons: addicted to vice or immorality; of depraved habits; profligate, wicked.” Accessed on April 9, 2004.

⁵Hanway, *Plan for Establishing Charity-House*, viii.

⁶Hanway, *Plan for Establishing Charity-House*, xv.

⁷Hanway, *Plan for Establishing Charity-House*, xiii-xiv. (Italics are in the original.)

⁸Hanway, *Plan for Establishing Charity-House*, xiv.

⁹Hanway, *Plan for Establishing Charity-House*, xvii. (Italics are in the original.)

¹⁰Hanway, *Plan for Establishing Charity-House*, xv.

¹¹*The Rules, Orders and Regulations of the Magdalen House, for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes*, (London, 1760), 3-4.

¹²*Rules of the Magdalen Charity*, 19.

¹³*Rules of the Magdalen Charity*, 20.

¹⁴*Rules of the Magdalen Charity*, 20.

¹⁵*Rules of the Magdalen Charity*, 21.

¹⁶Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 14.

¹⁷Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 14.

¹⁸Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 14-15.

¹⁹Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England*, (Montreal, 1994), 229, 231.

²⁰Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, 231.

²¹Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, 186-187.

²²Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850*, (New Haven, 2001), 111-112.

²³Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, 173 and Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, 163.

²⁴Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century*, (Princeton, 1989), 122.

²⁵Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 123.

²⁶Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 126.

²⁷William Dodd, *An Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Magdalen Hospital, for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes. Together with Dr. Dodd's Sermons. To Which are Added, the Advice to the Magdalens; with the Psalms, Hymns, Prayers, Rules, and List of Subscribers. The Fifth Edition*, (London, 1776), 1-16. Quote is on page 15.

²⁸Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 11-12.

²⁹Gerald Howson, *The Macaroni Parson: A Life of the Unfortunate Dr. Dodd*, (London, 1973), 43-44.

³⁰*Dictionary of National Biography*. Entry for "Walpole, Horatio or Horace, fourth Earl of Orford, (1717-1797)."

³¹W. S. Lewis, ed., *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence. Volume Nine, Horace Walpole's Correspondence with George Montagu, edited by W. S. Lewis and Ralph S. Brown, Jr.* (New Haven, 1941), xxiii.

³²Lewis, *Walpole's Correspondence, Volume Nine*, xxi-xxii.

³³Lewis, *Walpole's Correspondence, Volume Nine*, 273-274. Letter to George Montagu dated 28 January 1760.

³⁴The complete passage of the *New American Bible* translation of Genesis 30:37-43 reads: “Jacob, however, got some fresh shoots of poplar, almond and plane trees, and he made white stripes in them by peeling off the bark down to the white core of the shoots. The rods that he had thus peeled he then sat upright in the watering troughs, so that they would be in front of the animals that drank from the troughs. When the animals were in heat as they came to drink, the goats mated by the rods, and so they brought forth streaked, speckled and spotted kids. The sheep, on the other hand, Jacob kept apart, and he set these animals to face the streaked or fully dark-colored animals of Laban. Thus, he produced special flocks of his own, which he did not put with Laban’s flock. Moreover, whenever the hardier animals were in heat, Jacob would set the rods in the troughs in full view of these animals, so that they mated by the rods; but with the weaker animals he would not put the rods there. So the feeble animals would go to Laban, but the sturdy ones to Jacob. Thus the man grew increasingly prosperous, and he came to own not only large flocks but also male and female servants and camels and asses.”

³⁵Lewis, *Walpole’s Correspondence, Volume Nine*, 217, footnote 1.

³⁶Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 45.

³⁷Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 55-56.

³⁸Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 59-60.

³⁹Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics*, 231-238.

⁴⁰Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 62.

⁴¹Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 64.

⁴²Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 64. Italics in the original.

⁴³Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 82.

⁴⁴Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, 4-6.

⁴⁵Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 83-84.

⁴⁶Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 89-90.

⁴⁷E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (New York: 1966), 56-59.

⁴⁸Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 121.

⁴⁹Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 131.

⁵⁰*New American Bible* translation of Job 29:12.

⁵¹Dodd, *Account of the Magdalen Hospital*, 140-142.

⁵² Jonathan Reeves, *The Lost Sheep Found. A Sermon Preached at the Magdalen House, Goodman's-Fields, on Sunday, August 13, 1758, at the Opening of That House*, (London: 1758), Front Matter.

⁵³Reeves, *Lost Sheep Found*, 5.

⁵⁴Reeves, *Lost Sheep Found*, 12.

⁵⁵Reeves, *Lost Sheep Found*, 2.

⁵⁶Reeves, *Lost Sheep Found*, 11.

⁵⁷*Dictionary of National Biography*. Entry for "Glasse, Samuel (1735-1812)."

⁵⁸Samuel Glasse, *A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of the Magdalen Hospital, Before the Right Honorable Francis, Earl of Hertford, &c. President; the Vice-Presidents, Treasurer, and Governors, &c. on Thursday, May 1, 1777*, (London, 1777), 11.

⁵⁹Glasse, *Sermon Preached in Magdalen Hospital*, 13.

⁶⁰William Bell Williams, *Mary Magdalene. A Sermon, Preached in the Chapel of the Magdalen Hospital*, (London, 1794), 16.

CHAPTER III

PROSTITUTION AS PROBLEM

Even after the Magdalen Hospital had operated for nearly forty years, concerned citizens wrote and published several tracts about what they saw as the problem of prostitution in late eighteenth century England. These works were short in length, and were topical pamphlets sold by London booksellers. The authors of these titles had various professed aims for their works. In some cases, the writers of these short pamphlets wanted to see prostitutes as “separate from the majority of laboring people,” because the authors wanted to represent prostitutes as “part of the idle and undeserving poor” and therefore different from others of the prostitutes’ economic and social class, or because they wanted to portray prostitutes as daughters of “respectable famil[ies] who retained many middle-class virtues even in the midst of their degradation.”¹ That is, the women who became prostitutes were not like others of their class because they were exploiters of society, but then they still held some recognizable characteristics although they were prostitutes. This dichotomy was an example of the troubled relationship between reality and image. Reality showed that the prostitute was an economically disadvantaged woman; image dictated that she was a misguided, ever virtuous middling woman. The authors of these short works, like the clergymen in the sermons and the authors of documents related to the establishment and operation of the Magdalen Charity, focused their reforming attention exclusively on prostitutes. As will be shown shortly, when any attention was paid to the men who patronized the prostitutes, it was done in a way that was class based, but not in any way that drew attention to the

relationship between client and prostitute. Instead, this class based view centered upon elites' superior position in society as exemplars of good behavior.

The prostitute was an undesirable character in English society, at least in these authors' estimations, because she took from society and gave nothing in return. This view said that prostitutes did not return anything substantial to English society. Because she, like the poor families who continued to have illegitimate children with no financial means of supporting them, took resources from society, she should be shown another course of action. In fact, she "drain[ed] away productivity, to make her own and her clients' potential labor power and time into occasions for waste of both substance and opportunity."² Some contemporary authors suggested that the prostitute took the energy and livelihood away from her clients, her family and herself. She charged for her services and therefore took money from men who otherwise would have used it to pay for goods for their families. Her family lost a potentially lucrative marriage when she turned to prostitution. As long as she worked as a prostitute, she denied herself the possibility of leading a satisfying life. These were some of the implicit arguments made in works that detailed prostitution as a problem, and sought solutions to that problem. While the authors of these tracts against prostitution disagreed about the social origins of prostitutes and the ways that prostitution presented problems to their society, they agreed on one feature. They all wrote that the existence of prostitution in their society debased that society's lower orders, both economically and socially through the prostitute's siphoning of resources and her bad example. Their writings express their class bias

against the economically disadvantaged and the view that prostitutes would ruin the class status of both common and elite society.

One such author concerned about prostitution published a short work anonymously in 1792, titled *The Evils of Adultery and Prostitution with an Inquiry into the Causes of their Present Alarming Increase, and Some Means Recommended for Checking their Progress*. While prostitution and adultery are two different behaviors, this work puts them together as a common and growing problem of late eighteenth century society, because, the author said, both had detrimental effects on the health of marriage and family.³ Prostitution was most detrimental to women because in its practice women lost their beauty and station in life. The author wrote:

The unhappy females devoted to this life are, in general, the finest of women. It is their youth, beauty, and innocence, that render them the objects of temptation. Their very excellencies become their misfortunes.... Thus the finest of women are for ever cut off from all usefulness; and though destined for the ornament and blessing of the world, become its nuisances and disgrace. The lovely female, formed by nature to be the happy mother of numerous offspring, is condemned by prostitution to be a fruitless and rotten member, the outcast of society, and the bane and ruin of families.... She that was educated in a strict reverence of God and of his name, has her mouth constantly filled with blasphemies and horrid imprecations. In these detestable habits, the softness, the delicacy, and innocence of the female character are totally sunk.⁴

In this author's estimation, to be a prostitute was to deny one's female existence. Her "excellencies" became her "misfortunes" and she was thereafter "useless." She was destined to be "the happy mother of numerous offspring" but instead becomes "fruitless" and "rotten" and an "outcast of society and the bane and ruin of families." She was all of these things because she did not conform to what was expected of her. There was no mention in this passage of why she became a prostitute; only that her decision to do so

rendered her a “nuisance,” a “disgrace” and “condemned.” The author also wrote, “The female character, once divested of modesty and bashfulness, often passes to the greatest extreme and is capable, perhaps, of a greater degree of depravity than the other sex.”⁵ Women who lost their natural “modesty and bashfulness” and became prostitutes were no longer capable of retaining the companionship of any genteel women. This observation assumed that women existed in a natural state of modesty and bashfulness, a trait that, if it was true at all, applied more to upper class women than to the poor women who typically were prostitutes. Upper class women had the advantage of a wealthy family that supported them, and had the time and inclination to be “modest” and “bashful.” Women with little or no financial support had to secure their sustenance through other means and did not necessarily exhibit such traits. They were more concerned with daily life than with being “modest” and “bashful.”⁶

This author had several ideas about why and how prostitution had increased in London in this period as well. In discussing the causes for the increase in prostitution, the author drew significant attention to the class relationships between prostitutes and their clients. First on this list of causes of prostitution was the behavior of men “of rank and fortune. ... It is from them that we are to expect the lead in either virtue or vice. ... By degrees, they descend from the palace to the cottage.”⁷ This is one of the only sources that acknowledged elite men’s sex with poor women as central to prostitution’s practice in the streets of London. While many writers kept attention focused on the prostitute only, this author pointed to the actions of elite men as reprehensible as well. However, he did not condemn the behavior of these “men of rank and fortune” because

they were paying to have sex with women; instead, he objected to their lust because they were supposed to lead by example for the lower classes of people—a class-based assumption. This did not mean that he supported the elites’ having relations with women of lower economic status, but his reasoning for exactly why the situation was wrong told of a class bias that favored elites.

The author saw “the luxury and opulence of the nation” as another presumed cause of prostitution.⁸ The author replicated an argument that we found in the sermon of William Bell Williams in Chapter II, namely that a desire for finer goods led some women into a life of prostitution. This cause was one of prostitution’s problems because it seemed to allow those of lesser financial resources to have access to items that previously were only available to their social superiors. Women of lower rank wanted to pursue a life that included finer goods, and spent too much of their income on these “luxuries” and therefore turned to prostitution to earn the money to pay for them. Prostitution created a problem not only of economically ruined women paying for goods through illicit means. It also provided a way for social inferiors to imitate their betters, at least in this anonymous author’s estimation—which was undesirable.

Finally, after having expressed opinions of why prostitution was a problem and why it occurred at all, the author concluded by offering a few potential solutions to the dilemma as he saw it. Discouragement of celibacy and encouragement of marriage, more regular and severe police action directed against all houses of ill fame and more severe punishments for adultery were some of his solutions, but the fourth and final one was the most telling of an inherent class bias.⁹ This final suggestion dealt with women’s

education, and its need for reform. The author wrote that the contemporary education of female students

[was] favorable to looseness of principle and manners. There is scarcely any provision made for rendering them industrious, good housewives, or for providing a proper employment for the mind. Women, in the present system of education, are treated as the playthings and amusements of the other sex, as without usefulness and without a character. . . . The whole system seems contrived to bring them up for courtesans and strumpets, not for mothers and wives.¹⁰

Women needed to be trained in proper womanly tasks so that they are better able to cope with lives as wives and mothers. This author believed that if the women were differently educated and held men to a higher standard, no more of them would become victims of prostitution. All women of the eighteenth century were “educationally deprived,” and poor women were even more so.¹¹ To educate women in more practical pursuits, the author suggested, would make them more able to conduct life successfully. The author assumed that women’s education was a problem, and therefore assumed that all women, prostitutes and otherwise, received an education. As this was not the case, this point revealed another class blindness of those who wished to reform late eighteenth century prostitutes.

Apparently, English society did not observe the anonymous author’s potential solutions, because the issue was still important enough in 1799 for another anonymous author to publish *Thoughts on Means of Alleviating the Miseries attendant upon Common Prostitution*. The author states that the size and “opulence” of London, as compared to rural locales, made the capital city an attractive location for the practice of prostitution, and also made it harder to find and eliminate.¹² Again, an author has made

the point that the “opulence” of London made it a center for prostitution. This author, like the others who made that argument, was most disturbed by the ways that members of the lower classes were thus able to imitate their social and economic betters. This was especially odious because this practice encouraged prostitution through its encouragement of consumerism. This author considered the prostitute a casualty of this “opulence” and wrote, “Of those who never tell their grief, ... the most unfriended and most wretched are those unhappy females ...[who are called]... Girls or Women of the Town.... They are a property equally regarded as common, equally base, equally to be trampled on.”¹³ Instead of pursuing the prostitute as a careless woman who turned to that practice to pay for her lifestyle, this author viewed her as a victim and declared her common “property.” She has become property to be bought and sold. Additionally, she was “base” property that was “equally to be trampled on”—certainly not valued property. The luxury and opulence of the capital has become such that “Girls or Women of the Town” became disposable commodities. The prostitute was the lowest member of her society, but her client, or more aptly in this analogy, her consumer, was exempt from these harsh characterizations. If he were not willing to pay for her services, she would not have been able to provide them.

Bawds, the author said, complicated the prostitute’s life further because these brothel-keepers controlled the prostitute’s shelter, food and clothing.¹⁴ This construction of helpless seduced girls forced to live in horrible conditions by sadistic brothel keepers was useful as a rhetorical technique because it made the prostitute a sympathetic victim not only of her own ignorance but also the brutality of the bawd. It was, however, a

misrepresentation of the truth. Prostitutes “generally worked the streets in pairs,” and hardly ever worked for bawds, or in bawdy houses.¹⁵ Buildings that housed a bawd and her prostitutes, and were exclusively given over to that activity, existed only on the high end of the trade. Usually, a prostitute solicited for her clients in the street and took them to her apartment or other cheap lodgings in the capital that existed for that very purpose—in back rooms of bars, for example.¹⁶ The author’s misrepresentation of a prostitute’s life served his technique well, because he rendered his subject that much more sympathetic, but it gave the impression that the prostitute was kept in her trade by a proprietor of a house that provided lodging and food—which we know was not the usual case. If the bawd provided the prostitute’s immediate material needs, then prostitutes must have plied their trade either because they wanted to or because the bawds forced them to do so. This makes the client less culpable in the prostitute’s condition. The fact that this was largely untrue revealed the author’s desire to remove clients from their complicity in the continuing practice of prostitution.

In 1809, Frederick Smith wrote *An Appeal to the Virtue and Good Sense of the Inhabitants of St. Martin in the Fields And other Parishes in Westminster ...on the Subject of Prostitutes Walking the Streets*. Smith viewed the prostitutes who worked in various areas around the city as a problem and wanted to do something to end the practice. Smith sought to engage his readers so that they would become aware of the possibilities of reforming prostitutes. Smith knew that this was no easy task, as “there are ... persons ... who ... think, that females who have once deviated from the paths of moral rectitude, are unworthy the expense or labor of an attempt at their reformation.”¹⁷

In a manner similar to other reformers before him, Smith anticipated and attempted to answer potential objections to the aiding of prostitutes. Smith sought to remind these objectors, however, that the women who became prostitutes experience hardship:

But when we reflect, that from their first deviation from modesty, they have been driven out, as it were, from the society of the virtuous, with no cheering prospect that the calamitous situation they have been brought into will ever be overlooked by their own, or by the other sex, we shall find one cause of that desperate state of wickedness in which we see them plunged; destitute of those rational comforts which every other class of society seems earnestly aspiring after.¹⁸

Although he ostensibly hoped to portray the prostitute in a manner that would render her worthy of aid by the objectors, Smith nonetheless described the prostitute in unflattering terms. “Their first deviation from modesty” was enough for these women to lose their social respectability. No one would ever allow them back into their company again; they were ruined. This judgment may have been subjective, but it suggested that the women who “deviate[d] from modesty” were culpable alone. Furthermore, Smith referred to the prostitute as “destitute of those rational comforts which every other class of society seems earnestly aspiring after.” Thus, prostitutes were a class unto themselves. They were lower than everyone else because they were “destitute” of what others aspired after; their condition removed them from the company of either sex, so the prostitutes had neither contentment nor friendship. Though Smith’s vision of the prostitute was dim, it was potentially sympathetic to rich and poor alike. Smith’s understanding of the problem of prostitution, then, was an unorthodox class-based one. Instead of being seduced into prostitution by their desire for wealth as with several other renderings of prostitutes, the women in Smith’s example had one “deviation from

modesty,” were forced into prostitution because of the distance that that deviation put between them and their social circle, and were void of any contentment that every other “class” of people wanted. His example was appealing to all, but it ignored the client who enabled the prostitute to continue to practice her trade.

Although capable of including the poor in the possible sympathetic supporters of help for the prostitutes, Smith nonetheless held disparaging views of the lower orders. Smith said society needed to end prostitution not only because it ruined some women’s lives, but also because of the “indecent conversation” that the genteel members of the surrounding neighborhood were forced to hear, offending those who knew what salacious expressions meant and corrupting the innocent minds of those who did not previously know what such language conveyed.¹⁹ Historian Randolph Trumbach has noted that prostitutes’ “lewd conversations in the public street were both a means of creating erotic excitement and of showing the degree to which they had left behind conventional female behavior.” However, based on his research into defamation cases, in which respectable wives used “extremely frank sexual language,” Trumbach found that “this behavior may have been less unconventional for poor women than it might seem.”²⁰ Therefore, this comment about lewd conversations on the street may say less about Smith’s views about prostitutes than about his disparaging beliefs about the poor. Lewd conversations were not unique to prostitutes; they were a fact for poor women. Smith listed prostitutes’ use of vulgar language as a reason to rid streets of prostitution, but poor women (and men) used such language frequently. If one were to rid areas of

London of people who spoke salaciously in the public areas, one would eliminate more than just prostitutes.

Smith also found that when prostitutes lived and worked in a neighborhood it provided “a continued means of drawing together herds of the most depraved and dissolute characters, who are acquainted with every species of vice....”²¹ The neighborhoods where prostitutes were known to assemble were indeed the more criminal ones. The attempts made to separate these areas from the more fashionable ones were not very successful, as the prostitute often traveled between the two areas. “Indeed, the figure of the prostitute was the link between the two, the conduit through which the squalor of the gin shop might soil the elegance of the promenade.”²² The prostitute walked the streets of the fashionable area, and so did her clients. In fact, the prostitute herself was a physical conduit between the “squalor of the gin shop” and the “elegance of the promenade.” She was a reminder of class mingling, whether she walked in the poorest or richest areas of London.

Although the prostitute was an unwelcome sight to her presumed social betters, and one that these people—women and men alike—attempted to hide, the fact was that she did exist. Authors who saw prostitution as a general problem of society recognized this and sought to control or eliminate prostitutes’ walking in their respective areas of London. These writers had various solutions to the problem, but all found the fault with prostitutes and not their clients. The continual focus on the low status of prostitutes and their conditions avoided dealing with the subject of the men who patronized them. If they considered more fully the reasons why the women were prostitutes or why they

could walk the streets at all, the authors of these works may have realized an entirely different viewpoint: one that saw the prostitute as economically dependent on the money she earned from her relations with the men who paid her.

Notes

¹Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis*, (London, 1999), 43.

²Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century*, (Princeton, 1989), 121.

³*The Evils of Adultery and Prostitution with an Inquiry into the Causes of Their Present Alarming Increase, and Some Means Recommended for Checking Their Progress*, (London, 1792), 3.

⁴*Evils of Adultery*, 11-14.

⁵*Evils of Adultery*, 14-15.

⁶Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth Century England*, (Montreal, 1994), 231, 238-239.

⁷*Evils of Adultery*, 44.

⁸*Evils of Adultery*, 46.

⁹*Evils of Adultery*, 61-70.

¹⁰*Evils of Adultery*, 70-74.

¹¹Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England 1660-1850* (New Haven, 2001), 54.

¹²*Thoughts on Alleviating the Miseries Attendant Upon Common Prostitution*, (London, 1799), 1.

¹³*Thoughts on Alleviating Prostitution*, 1-2.

¹⁴*Thoughts on Alleviating Prostitution*, 2-3.

¹⁵Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700-1800*, (New York, 1997), 95.

¹⁶Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 141.

¹⁷Frederick Smith, *An Appeal to the Virtue and Good Sense of the Inhabitants of St. Martin-in-the-Fields and Other Parishes on the Subject of Prostitutes Walking in the Streets*, (London, 1809), 3.

¹⁸Smith, *Appeal to Virtue*, 3.

¹⁹Smith, *Appeal to Virtue*, 7.

²⁰Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume One, Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*, (Chicago, 1998), 155.

²¹Smith, *Appeal to Virtue*, 8.

²²Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 176-177.

CHAPTER IV

PRESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE

In the eighteenth century, novels were a relatively new genre and were quite controversial, partly because they included inappropriate subject matter and traditionally private scenes that some people thought were indelicate.¹ Not everyone was opposed to the idea of novels, however, and some writers even saw the benefit of telling cautionary tales in this new format. Because of this, I have titled this chapter, which deals with fiction and advice literature “Prescriptive Literature.” Both forms attempted to explain correct behaviors to their readers, therefore both are prescriptive. There were some early novels that dealt directly with prostitutes and their friends and families, and they did so in ways that were different from the treatment in sermons, accounts of the Magdalen Hospital or pamphlets that wanted to cure society of prostitution. Although we have found that the women who became prostitutes did so out of economic necessity and were viewed by some authors as “poor” and “pestilent,” in fictional works, the opposite will be true in every case that we study here. The women who became prostitutes in the novels that we consider did so not because of economic need, but because they were first seduced by suitors. The suitors, however, were always of a higher social and economic class than these women were. This construction revealed a view of prostitutes similar to those we have previously discussed, that is, a view that showed that chaos ensued when elite men had sex with women of lower social and financial rank than they were. Whereas other forms of literature that we have thus far considered did not mention social and financial rank specifically, these fictional works did, and they underscored what the

other writers saw as one of the problems of prostitution: the sexual relations of men with lower class women.

An epistolary novel of the late eighteenth century that dealt directly with the subject of prostitution was *The Magdalen* (1799), the supposedly true story of the first woman admitted to the Magdalen charity, told in letters from this woman to a wealthy benefactress who supported her during her time in the Hospital.² In this work, the beneficial class relationship between an elite woman and a repentant prostitute was held in high regard. The upper class woman was praised for her interest in the repentant prostitute and the reformed prostitute described her as “kind,” “generous,” “benevolent,” and “possessed of all the sweetness and delicacies of a tender mind.”³ This relationship appeared to be placed within the story to give the impression that elite support of the charity was a worthwhile investment. The “editor” of the letters wrote in the preface that the penitent’s story “convinced the world, that there needed only a place of refuge for such a number of unhappy and miserable creatures, to impel them to an early application, before a long course of libertinism had taken such entire hold of their minds, as to render every virtuous effort abortive.”⁴ The benefactress remained nameless, but the repentant prostitute was known by the initials M. S. M. S. recounted to her benefactress the story of her seduction, betrayal, subsequent time as a prostitute and life before she came to the Magdalen Charity because M.S. wanted to warn other young women who may be in a situation similar to hers.

The warning within these letters to the benefactress presumed the “editor’s” statement in the preface that the letters “have many years been read with pleasure and

entertainment by the circle of that lady's acquaintance, and by many of them thought worthy of the public eye"⁵ because to warn other women, they had to be shared among many people. While passing the letters "among the circle of that lady's acquaintance" did spread the warning, it did so in a limited way. If the reader were to believe what the "editor" wrote in the preface, then, originally M.S.'s letters were read by an audience of the benefactress's acquaintances—presumably wealthy ladies. Now the warning was being given to anyone who could purchase or read the book. Reading the book of M.S.'s story then temporarily allowed the audience to live vicariously in the realm of the wealthy. The audience was able to view the penitent prostitute's life in the way that the elites did as well: as an unfortunate who was not like them, because they were reading about her and safe from the temptations that she faced. It was both voyeuristic and elitist.

The "editor" of the preface told the reader that the book was "the history of one of those unhappy women who would have continued virtuous and innocent, blameless and easy, but for the arts and insinuations of one whose rank and fortune furnished him with the means to corrupt and delude her."⁶ M. S., like other fictional women we will encounter, was seduced by a man more financially fortunate than she was. M. S.'s seducer, who was the son of the family for whom M. S. worked after her parents died, was not overtly described in terms that made him excessively wealthy. M. S. referred to members of the family in socially telling ways: she referred to the patriarch as "Sir George," while the matriarch was simply referred to as "my lady" or "Mrs. Markland." Finally, M. S. only referred to the son of the family who seduced her as "Mr. Markland."

Her lack of familiarity in reference to him implied an inherent class bias, that he was somehow still above her and deserved to be treated deferentially. Despite the lack of description of wealth, however, he and M. S. were able to live together in London without either of them working. Although the seducer did not leave M. S. after having first had sex with her, M. S.'s relationship with a man of a higher social and financial rank than she was nonetheless ended in ruin. Mr. Markland left her and their infant child one day without provision, and he never returned. After he left, she said, "While [he] loved, he was generous; and as I was a good economist, I had near one hundred pounds by me," and she began to work as a seamstress. These funds did not last long, however, as Mr. Markland left without having paid the rent for their home for several months, which left M. S. to pay the bill.⁷ Her affair with a man of higher rank literally left M. S. in ruin. In her book *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, Volume One, 1500-1800*, Olwen Hufton wrote about this work:

Hence an appeal was made to the British establishment by conforming to the images that the establishment had of the fallen woman, whose fall was attributable to misfortune and the unsportsmanlike behavior of one of its own sons. Clearly the [author] saw nothing to be gained from presenting the case of the girl who had committed the offense with her social equal. Protestant tolerance, or rather in many instances conditional compassion, depended on the act of fornication being one where the man's social status was distinctly higher than that of the woman. Who she was when she fell, and how she fell, were the essence of the problem. Economic considerations were allowed to co-exist with moral ones.⁸

After she worked briefly as a seamstress and later as a prostitute, M. S. turned to begging for money to buy bread for her illegitimate son and herself. While begging, M.S. said she

seldom had far to go, before [she] met with some gentleman, who, though hard hearted to my distress, would be indulgent to his own vice. I often thought the cleanly simplicity of my dress (for I had no ornaments) pleased more than the tawdry decorations of the women who generally follow that course; for while a man courts our vice, his reason hates our impudence. I was sensible that by entering into a society of prostitutes, I might gain a settled subsistence, but I could not think of engaging in a way of life I detested. I still hoped some means would at last relieve my necessities, and that I should not always be reduced to prostitution, to which I could not bring myself to consent...⁹

What was especially noteworthy in this passage was M.S.'s assertion that her clothes

were plain and therefore should not have made people think that she was a prostitute.

Her concerns spoke not only of the perceived dress of the potential prostitute, but also of

a desire to shun luxury. In this way, though she worked at one time as a prostitute, M.S.

showed that she knew her social position and did not attempt to imitate her betters. We

have seen that some authors correlated luxury and excess in the lower orders with a lax

moral code, so M. S. (or her author) was speaking to concerns of both presumptions—

M.S. dressed plainly so that she would not arouse attention as a prostitute or as an

indigent woman attempting to pass herself off as a wealthy woman. If a wealthy woman

dressed nicely, she was not associated with prostitution; if a destitute woman did the

same, she was trying to be more than what she was and must therefore be a prostitute. In

the *Rules, Orders and Regulations of the Magdalen Charity*, as we have seen, if the

women entered the Charity with clothes “too fine for their station,” they were sold and

the money given to the women. If they entered with clothing that was “in any tolerable

condition,” the clothing was saved to return to the women when their time in the Charity

was over.¹⁰ Clearly, society wanted to believe that if a destitute woman attempted to

imitate her betters in style of dress or mannerisms, she must be a prostitute. We have

seen several arguments from ministers and reformers who believed that many women turned to prostitution to pay for a lifestyle that they could not afford; M.S.'s comments, and the statements of the Magdalen Charity, in its *Rules, Orders and Regulations*, show that this view was widespread.

M. S. also told her benefactress the stories of some of the other women she met in the Magdalen Hospital. "It is true, many of them have not had the unspeakable advantages of education, the tender care of parents, nor the wise directions of solicitous friends, but ... have been ship-wrecked on vice."¹¹ M.S., who now "occupies an elevated rank in life,"¹² as the author of the preface told the reader, has taken her new class's view of her former fellow prostitutes. She painted them as ignorant women who were duped into seduction and prostitution. She wrote, "Others have been deluded into the road of ruin by the most flattering and delusive promises ... such as few unsuspecting hearts, perhaps, could have withstood; and when undone, have been left by their cruel seducers a miserable prey to infamy and distress."¹³ These women had no one to care for them, and no education, therefore they have turned to vice. However, M. S. was careful to paint her fellow former prostitutes as truly contrite and repentant. She wrote, "They have expressed the utmost detestation of their way of life; and some with such tender and affecting sentiments, as would do no discredit to the most rigid virtue."¹⁴ Although M. S. supposedly wrote the letters while she was still within the Magdalen Hospital, her tone in the passages about her fellow wards revealed hints of her future class status. I have previously discussed the ways that the work appeared to give readers an inside glimpse into elite views of prostitutes, and M. S. reflected these views. The

other women were pitiable; M. S. compared them to a suffering animal, and pleaded with “part[s] of [her] own sex” to support the women of the Magdalen Charity. She wrote,

Those of the most rigid and the most obdurate kind, were they to behold a poor harmless animal fallen into distress, and suffering in misery, and were able to reach out their hand, and to help it, would I am sure have so much compassion as not to suffer themselves to pass by it unregarded. How much more does it beho[o]ve them, then, to reach out their hands to the relief of the unfortunate part of their own sex when in their power; and if fallen into the pit of extreme distress, without any hand to relieve, with but few hearts to compassionate, and if unrelieved speedily, perish in the utmost misery, and breathe out, perhaps, from polluted bodies, more polluted souls, into a world of utter and everlasting woe; when, by a timely interference of such benevolent persons as yourself, Madam, they would be preserved from those scenes of horror!¹⁵

This request for aid drew the reader to the lives of the elite as well as the prostitutes.

The elite could support the charity, and after hearing M. S.’s and others’ stories of their lives, were more likely to do so. The non-wealthy who read the book could also support the charity, but not to the extent the rich could. The request for aid went out to all who read the book; the wealthy were usually most targeted for such solicitation, so the readership was treated as if they were wealthy. While the work contained class-based views of prostitutes, it nonetheless attempted to close the gap between rich and poor by allowing all who read it to get a small understanding of how the financially fortunate viewed prostitutes.

Another epistolary novel that dealt with women and their potential to become prostitutes was Hugh Kelly’s *Memoirs of a Magdalen: or, the History of Louisa Mildmay*, published in 1767. The letters told a story of a young woman, Louisa Mildmay, who fell in love with a suitor, was ruined by him and then was disowned by

her family. She went to live with a family friend in town and was kidnapped, imprisoned and nearly raped by another man who professed his love for her. Her seducer learned of this, killed the second man in a duel and married Louisa.¹⁶ Although she never worked as a prostitute, Louisa still qualified to be called “Magdalen,” because in the time after the founding of the Magdalen Charity, the term applied to seduced young women in general. In fact, by the mid-1780’s, the Charity admitted more of these types of women, that is those that “had not yet been publicly on the town,” than those who had worked as prostitutes.¹⁷

The author told the reader that Louisa was well bred and was very beautiful. When her seducer first saw her, he remarked that her beauty was well known and her family history recommended her well. Based on both of these qualities, he decided to commence a relationship with her. However, he was of a higher class, both socially and economically, and did not want to marry her because she had premarital sex with him.¹⁸ This portion of the story was significant. It established an attraction between two people of different social rank, though these differences were minor, with the man being of the higher order. The man had no objections to the relationship until the woman had sex with him; he then believed that she would have sex with anyone who would have her.¹⁹ This attitude associated women of lower social order with prostitution. If she had been of higher rank than he was, her relations with him would presumably not have elicited the same reaction. Because he had “superior faculties” as other writers whom we have studied termed it, he was able to seduce her easily and presumed that other men would have had a comparably easy time when they tried. Her willingness to have sex with him

proved to him that she was of lower order; and everyone knew that women of lower order were not able to withstand the advances of men of higher order. In a letter to a friend, her seducer wrote, "I considered Louisa in quite a different light from any of those women with whom I had formerly trifled; and set her down as a lady, whose reputation was immediately connected with my own."²⁰ While Louisa Mildmay was certainly not of the lowest class of women who, in the reality of the eighteenth century, plied the trade of prostitution, she was analogous to that real woman because she had sex with a man of higher rank than she was. In the telling of her story in this way, the author showed that women of the upper order were not exempt from these relationships and feelings.

The men who frequented prostitutes were of a higher order than the prostitutes;²¹ reformers and authors discussed this relationship of class disparity not in terms of the fact that elite men should not be having sex with poor women. In fact, non-fiction authors avoided the overt mention of the possibility of upper class men having sex with lower class women or prostitutes. Fiction writers presented these scenes in their work about prostitutes and young seduced women. However, both the non-fiction and fiction authors suggested that the poor women should not be available for these men. In fact, the seducer in this work partly blamed his seduction of Louisa on her parents, because too often, the parents allowed the lovers to be alone together and thereby introduced the possibility of his seduction of her.²² The argument that the women were too available to the men, and too open to possible seduction, focused attention on the women and kept the discussion away from the middling or upper-class man who seduced and patronized

her. If the men did not attempt to seduce women, or pay prostitutes for sex, then there presumably would not have been a problem of prostitution.

Novels were not the only fictional works to explore the lives of prostitutes in the late eighteenth century; poems also dealt directly with the subject of prostitution. In 1771, John Huddleston Wynne published a poem simply titled, "The Prostitute." Wynne was a contributor to several eighteenth century periodicals and wrote histories of Ireland and of the British in America.²³ The poem offered a familiar story of a woman who has a disastrous relationship with a man of a higher economic and social rank than she was. The poem, although it chiefly concerned itself with the sordid details of the main characters' lives, nonetheless allowed readers to gain the same visions of what came of seduction as did the authors of the stories of M. S. and Louisa Mildmay.

The heroine of the poem, Melissa, is the daughter of a clergyman. In the first few pages of the poem, she is set to marry a man of comparable rank and fortune.²⁴ Unlike so many of the relationships we have discussed, this relationship is described as a good and happy (and sexless) match. This first attachment appeared to exist in the poem because it established a background for Melissa's future. Her relationship with this man was not upwardly mobile; consequently, it was a potentially very happy one. Unfortunately, the future husband died, and Melissa became enamored of Claudio, an extremely wealthy man who moved into the neighborhood. Everyone around her told Melissa that this match would not work; she became pregnant by the new suitor, who promptly threw her out and into a life on the streets of London. Melissa became a prostitute and died of an unknown disease. As was the case with M. S. and Louisa

Mildmay, Melissa's relationship with a man who was above her socially and financially ruined her. Claudio was a baron and was blessed "with matchless eloquence of tongue" and possessed "that soft-soothing, wily pow'r ... which most can triumph o'er a virgin's breast." However, the poet told us, he "wanted virtue," and had seduced many girls in the past.²⁵

The poet described Claudio in unflattering ways, yet Melissa was not exempt from fault in his opinion. Wynne intimated that she entered into this relationship much too soon after her intended husband died.²⁶ After she had sex with the cruel baron, the poet wrote,

Such ruin still on Passion's reign attends,
When to its pow'r, the weaker Reason bends;
Such evils wait on those who heedless stray
From Virtue's path to Pleasure's devious way.
On ev'ry side a thousand ills abound,
Amaze the judgment, and the sense confound:
Lost and bewilder'd through the maze they roam,
Their restless souls can find no peaceful home,
On dazzling objects fixing fond desire,
And vainly following still a wand'ring fire,
Whose glare deludes them to their latest breath,
And leads to shame, to misery, and death.

In *men*, strict Honor and unblemish'd Truth
Preserv'd through age, as taught in early youth,
Are Virtue's bond; --a *woman's* nicer fame
Bids Chastity assume that Virtue's name:--
The gem once sully'd, we attempt in vain
It's former price and luster to regain,
The Bond once broke we vainly strive to tie:
The scatter'd virtues from their standard fly.
O then be wise! Avoid that lost estate,
And timely fly temptation's gilded bait.
So shall your days with smiling peace be crown'd
In life still happy, and in death renown'd.²⁷

Thus, once Melissa had sex, she lost her status as a respectable young woman. Women were supposed to be chaste; men knew that they had the potential to seduce women from their virtuous state, “as taught in early youth.” If Melissa had followed her role and remained chaste, the rest of her days would have been happy ones. The poet said that once virtue was lost, it was gone forever and “we attempt in vain” to “regain” it.

Although Melissa was held to this standard, the seducer was not criticized in terms of his lack of virtue. If anything, the poem judged Melissa much more harshly for her indiscretion; Claudio was only described as cruel later when he refused aid to Melissa.²⁸

In the passage where he left her after learning that she was pregnant, he wrote in a note left for her after he had gone that “others had a prior right; /Twice three he metion’d, and remark’d each name/Then rank’d her latest on the list of shame.”²⁹ Claudio was not criticized for this; it was only mentioned in passing. Again, the criticism was made against the woman in the relationship for being available for the man and not withholding her attentions from him.

After her brother found Melissa on the street and slowly dying years later, the poem ended with a plea for young women and those who cared for them to protect them and ensure that they did not meet a fate comparable to Melissa’s. The poet said that each young woman who read the poem “whose pitying tears for lost Melissa flow, /Still strive her faults and hapless end to shun, /Nor be, like her, by Passion’s reign undone, /Avoid in time the storms of adverse Fate, /Nor stay to prove them and repent too late!”³⁰ The point was that the young girls who felt sympathy for Melissa’s fate should not follow her example. Instead, her life should warn them of what could happen to

respectable girls who trusted too easily. What if a young man read this poem and felt sympathy for Melissa? Wynne did not address that possibility, but said that everyone should “instruct each youth [young men] and artless fair [young women], /To trace strict Honor’s paths with pious care” not necessarily because it would end the practice of prostitution, but to “lift their Country’s glory to the skies,” so that England would gain glory over its enemies.

Works that talked about stories of women like M. S., Louisa Mildmay, and Melissa served as examples of what not to do, and advice literature told readers what to do. While advice literature did not mention prostitution directly, it gave an indication of what was expected of middling sort women. One such work was *A Father’s Advice to his Daughters* which told young women of traits to look for in potential husbands, what to do when you quarreled with your spouse, and generally, how to conduct oneself in marriage.³¹ The absence of prostitution from advice literature showed that the audience for these works was either to get information about prostitution from other sources or believed to not be in danger of falling into that way of life. In either case, it was not mentioned specifically in these works, but that does not mean that it was not an important topic for the authors or their audience.

Although the authors of fictional and advice literature did not always refer to the women in obviously inferior terms, their subtle indications of their views of the prostitute’s class status were present nonetheless. The works of fiction describe sexual relations of women of social and economic ranks lower than those of their partners; as such, they do well to illustrate the ways that sex shared between middling and upper

class men and lower class women—women who did and did not work as prostitutes—were problematic. The colleagues of elite men who frequented lower class prostitutes did not openly discuss the nature of these unions, but their representations in the fictional accounts served as a veiled critique of these men. The depictions of women ruined by having pre-marital sex, whether or not they became prostitutes, told these men what could possibly happen if they were not respectful of women. The women in the fictional accounts, however, did not match completely with the lives of real prostitutes. Actual prostitutes of the late eighteenth century—who walked the streets and were not courtesans—were most likely not clergymen’s daughters or middling sort women. They were economically disadvantaged women who turned to prostitution to earn enough money to live. The creation of the seduced middling woman prevented the telling of the reality of economically disadvantaged prostitutes. Stories about these non-lower class seduced women “were likely to be more affecting objects of compassion ... [because they were women] whom the natural order of things according to the eighteenth century had not intended for misery. [They were] possessed of finer sensibilities than those the century was willing to ascribe to the lower classes.”³²

Notes

¹Richard A. Barney, *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. (Stanford, 1999), 19-20 and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. (Chicago, 1992), 64.

²The work has been attributed to William Dodd, although its original authorship is unknown. The exact same story, save for the epistolary form, was published in 1760 in a sentimental collection of admittedly fictional narratives, titled *The Histories of Some of the Penitents of the Magdalen-House, as Supposed to be Related by Themselves*,

written anonymously to encourage support of the Magdalen Charity. The stories of M. S. and Louisa Mildmay therefore may appear to be out of chronological order. In the 1760 edition of the story, however, there were no letters or an editor who compiled a preface for this particular story. I have therefore chosen to use the later edition with these other considerations in mind.

³William Dodd, *The Magdalen, or, History of the First Penitent Prostitute Received into That Charitable Asylum*, (London, 1799), 13, 77, 78.

⁴Dodd, *The Magdalen*, viii.

⁵Dodd, *The Magdalen*, v.

⁶Dodd, *The Magdalen*, vii.

⁷Dodd, *The Magdalen*, 45.

⁸Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1550-1800* (New York, 1995.), 321.

⁹Dodd, *The Magdalen*, 72-73.

¹⁰*The Rules, Orders and Regulations of the Magdalen House, for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes*, (London, 1760), 19.

¹¹Dodd, *Magdalen*, 76.

¹²Dodd, *Magdalen*, xi.

¹³Dodd, *Magdalen*, 76.

¹⁴Dodd, *Magdalen*, 77.

¹⁵Dodd, *Magdalen*, 77.

¹⁶Hugh Kelly, *Memoirs of a Magdalen: or, the History of Louisa Mildmay. Now First Published from a Series of Original Letters. In Two Volumes. Volumes I and II*. (London, 1767), passim.

¹⁷Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume One, Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*, (Chicago, 1998), 187.

¹⁸Kelly, *Memoirs of a Magdalen*, Vol. I, 8- 15.

¹⁹Kelly, *Memoirs of a Magdalen*, 71-74.

²⁰Kelly, *Memoirs of a Magdalen*, 65.

²¹Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, 163. He writes that, from the research he has done on how much the average prostitute charged, “Common laborers cannot often have afforded one-shilling whores. It may explain why most of the men arrested for being with prostitutes were artisans. ... The women who served the aristocracy expected even more. They commonly received, according to the prices in *Harris’s List*, from a half-guinea to two pounds.”

²²Kelly, *Memoirs of a Magdalen*, 63.

²³*Dictionary of National Biography*, entry for “Wynne, John Huddleston (1743-1788).”

²⁴John Huddleston Wynne, *The Prostitute, a Poem*, (London, 1771), 5-10.

²⁵Wynne, *The Prostitute*, 15.

²⁶Wynne, *The Prostitute*, 17, 21.

²⁷Wynne, *The Prostitute*, 26-27.

²⁸Wynne, *The Prostitute*, 38.

²⁹Wynne, *The Prostitute*, 29.

³⁰Wynne, *The Prostitute*, 44.

³¹*Father’s Advice to His Daughters*, (Sherbourne, 1776), i-4.

³²Susan Staves, “British Seduced Maidens,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14 (Winter, 1980-1981), 117.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined several specific sources of eighteenth century literature about prostitutes and found that some authors informed their discussions of prostitutes with class bias directed against the laboring classes. Whether writers saw the prostitute as the embodiment of all that was wrong with the lower orders, wanted to replace the habits she had learned from her own social and economic classes with more desirable middling ones, or failed to recognize her perilous financial situation, they expressed these opinions in ways that illustrated their low estimations of prostitutes and their social class. In sermons, plans for the Magdalen Charity, short works about the problem of prostitution and fictional and advice literature, that was consistently the case.

So, what do the topics covered in this thesis tell us? How is this thesis useful to scholarly study? The writers that have been isolated in this work focused their attention on prostitutes in a way that recognized a hidden fact: the authors were uneasy about poor women's relations with wealthy men. As we have seen, prostitutes charged rates that were frequently beyond the wealth of the typical men of their class level. Therefore, we can assume that the men who paid prostitutes were of higher social and economic classes than the women were. This relationship was different from the usual commercial ones between wealthy men and indigent women—prostitutes did not perform duties that could be acknowledged in public, as maids or other domestic helpers did. The prostitute/client relationship was of a private and intimate nature, and when it was between men of higher classes and women of lower ones, it posed a particular danger. The fact that elite

men had sex with poor women showed that social conventions—which stated that differences between the classes were natural and observable phenomena—were potentially false. If these presumed conventions were false, then the entire basis of elite society was essentially a house of cards that was built upon false assumptions and could collapse at any moment. The authors included in this study may not have consciously realized this fact, but their focus on the status of the women involved in prostitution helped to hide the fact of elite men's involvement in the prostitution of lower order women. This was also why the women were frequently pictured as being better off financially than they really were. If the authors wrote factually, the point that elite men were having sex with lower class women would have been more readily accessible, and would have shown that elite claims to innate superiority were false.

In thinking about how this sublimation of class anxiety works, it may be helpful to think of some more recent examples of anxiety in American history. For instance, when one considers black prostitutes who lived through racial segregation in nineteenth and twentieth century United States, one can learn how and why this fear of speaking publicly about elite men and lower class prostitutes' having sex was troublesome. White men patronized black prostitutes, although the races were supposedly naturally segregated. The fact that white men went to black prostitutes could not be discussed, however, because to do so would admit that segregation was not a natural fact, but a socially created distortion.¹ Additionally, when we think of the argument that some of the writers made, that prostitutes became so because of their living a lifestyle that they could not afford, we can relate that back to the 1980s political argument about so-called

“welfare queens,” who supposedly supported a lavish lifestyle by receiving as many federal welfare checks as they could from the United States government. Politicians then made the same argument about “welfare queens” that some of the eighteenth century writers in this thesis did about prostitutes: that they were women who were living beyond their allotted means and using fraudulent money to do so.

Other arguments that are not necessarily class based can find antecedents in the eighteenth century works that are studied in this thesis. The argument that objectors made to the Magdalen Charity, saying that it would only serve to encourage more young women to enter prostitution, can be related to the modern argument that schools should not have sexual education programs or make condoms freely available to their students because they would only encourage young people to engage in sexual activity. Rhetorical arguments that were shaped and made in the past recur in our modern age, with little variation.

There are other possibly fruitful paths of research about late eighteenth century prostitution that one could follow. This thesis speaks of authors’ use of medical terms identified with disease to describe prostitutes, yet it does not study the argument that some in the eighteenth century made, that the prostitute was the personal vehicle of destruction because she infected with venereal disease her clients, who transferred the disease to their wives. In the early nineteenth century, authors wrote works similar to those included in this piece that were very critical of prostitutes for their spread of disease. This, as well as other topics we do not yet know much about, will be projects for future scholars to study.

What this thesis has done, however, is identify an elitist, class- and gender-biased perspective that was expressed implicitly in eighteenth century writings. In his contribution to *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, Vern L. Bullough wrote,

Inevitably the failure to find any economic solution to prostitution made it difficult for reformers to advance any solution. Although they saw the prostitute as a victim, they continued to view her from an eighteenth-century masculine middle- and upper-class perspective.²

In the same way that these reformers could not isolate the prostitute from her social and economic classes, then, they could not separate themselves from their elite position in society. There was a changing society, and they coped with it in the best ways that they could. Their writings, then, reflect a changing worldview. In the time immediately following this study, the early nineteenth century, writers who authored works similar in content to the ones contained within this thesis, took a strong stand against prostitutes and prostitution. Whereas the authors mentioned in this work attempted to portray the prostitute sympathetically, writers who came after them did not do so; they were openly hostile.³ It is possible that this is the case because mid- to late-eighteenth century London was not quite sure about how to view its evolving society, while that vision was clearer in the beginning of the next century. Nevertheless, the somewhat generous view of the common prostitute was a short-lived phenomenon.

The writers that we have studied here intimated a sense of superiority to the prostitute on the part of both speaker and audience. The prostitute was regarded as "other": she was different because she did not yet value the ideals that upper middling men and women desired to see in their fellow citizens. She needed to be rescued so that

she could come to appreciate, and then embody, these traits. There was no sense that these traits were not applicable to all, or that some may not wish to have them. Those who donated to the Magdalen Hospital and those who wished to reform these women considered it manifestly self-evident that these women would want to act (if not become) as if they were financially and socially respectable. However, if she did embody these values, the reformers intimated, she was still to act within her class boundaries. The reformed prostitute could not become equal to middling and upper class women, even if she conformed to all that was expected of her. The classes were naturally separate from one another, no matter how similarly they spoke, behaved, or dressed.

In some sense, the prostitute came to embody elites' views of her. Tony Henderson looked at arrest records for women arrested for public vagrancy or other crimes and noticed that the terms "misfortunate" and "unfortunate" women came to be euphemisms for "prostitute." The women also began to refer to themselves in the same way to describe what they did for money. Henderson writes, "Miserable ill fate had become almost the defining characteristic of the prostitute."⁴ The elitist view became pervasive.

Notes

¹See Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York, 1998), 196.

²Vern L. Bullough, "Prostitution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century England," included in *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin (New York: 1987), 61.

³See, for instance, William Hale, *Address to the Public upon the Dangerous Tendency of the London Female Penitentiary; with Hints Relative to the Best Means of Lessening the Sum of Prostitution* (London, 1809).

⁴Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*, (London, 1999), 189.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources

- Advice to Unmarried Women: To Recover and Reclaim the Fallen.* N.p., 1791. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 756, No. 3.
- Antenuptial Fornication Considered.* N.p., 1766. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 774, No. 12.
- Beatson, John. *A Sermon on the Duty and Interest of Men as Members of Civil Society.* Hull, 1778. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 6338, No. 01.
- The Candid Friend: Addressed to a Young Gentleman.* N.p., 1797. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 320, No. 9.
- Dodd, William. "Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Magdalen Hospital, for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes. Together with Dr. Dodd's Sermons. To Which are Added, the Advice to the Magdalens; with the Psalms, Hymns, Prayers, Rules and List of Subscribers. The Fifth Edition." London, 1776. In *Prostitution Reform: Four Documents*, ed. Randolph Trumbach. New York: Garland, 1985.
- Dodd, William. *Advice to the Magdalens.* London, 1760. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 5216, No. 9.
- Dodd, William. *The Magdalen, or, History of the First Penitent Prostitute Received into that Charitable Asylum.* London, 1799. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 983, No. 14.
- Evils of Adultery and Prostitution with an Inquiry into the Causes of their Present Alarming Increase, and Some Means Recommended for Checking their Progress.* London, 1792. Accessed through *Goldsmiths' Kress Library of Economic Literature* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA No. 15344.

Father's Advice to His Daughters. Sherbourne, 1776. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 324, No. 8.

Glasse, Samuel. *A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of the Magdalen Hospital, Before the Right Honorable Francis, Earl of Hertford, &c. President; the Vice-Presidents, Treasurer, and Governors, &c. On Thursday, May 1, 1777.* London, 1777. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 4936, No. 14.

Hale, William. *Address to the Public upon the Dangerous Tendency of the London Female Penitentiary; with Hints Relative to the Best Means of Lessening the Sum of Prostitution.* London, 1809. Accessed through *Goldsmiths' Kress Library of Economic Literature* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA No. 19906.

Hanway, Jonas. *A Plan for Establishing a Charity-House or Charity-Houses for the Reception of Repenting Prostitutes. To be Called the Magdalen Charity.* London, 1758. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 3869, No. 13.

Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies. N.p., 1790 and 1793. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 8644, No. 05 (1790); and Reel 8644, No. 09 (1793).

Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen-House as Supposed to be Related by Themselves. London, 1760. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 127, No. 01.

Hunter, Henry. *The Success of the Gospel, through the Ministration of Weak and Sinful Men.* London, 1775. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 4137, No. 08.

Kelly, Hugh. *Memoirs of a Magdalen: or, the History of Louisa Mildmay. Now First Published from a Series of Original Letters. In Two Volumes.* London, 1767. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 218, No. 07.

Lardner, Nathaniel. *A Letter to Jonas Hanway, Esq.; in Which Some Reasons are Assigned, Why Houses for the Reception of Penitent Women, Who Have Been Disorderly in Their Lives, Ought Not to be Called Magdalen-Houses.* London,

1758. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 7456, No. 18.

- Lewis, W. S. and Ralph S. Brown, Jr., eds. *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*. Volume 9, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with George Montagu, Part I*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941.
- Pottle, Frederick A., ed. *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991. Originally published, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950. Reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Reeves, Jonathan. *The Lost Sheep Found. A Sermon Preached at the Magdalen House, Goodman's-Fields, on Sunday, August 13, 1758, at the Opening of That House*. London, 1758. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 7424, No. 10.
- The Rules, Orders and Regulations of the Magdalen House, for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes*. London, 1760. Accessed through *Goldsmiths' Kress Library of Economic Literature* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA No. 9523.
- Smith, Frederick. *An Appeal to the Virtue and Good Sense of the Inhabitants of St. Martin-in-the-Fields and Other Parishes on the Subject of Prostitutes Walking in the Streets*. London, 1809. Accessed through *Goldsmiths' Kress Library of Economic Literature* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA No. 19917.
- Thoughts on Alleviating the Miseries Attendant Upon Common Prostitution*. London, 1799. Accessed through *Goldsmiths' Kress Library of Economic Literature* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA No. 17775.
- Williams, William Bell. *Mary Magdalene. A Sermon, Preached in the Chapel of the Magdalen Hospital*. London, 1794. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 3898, No. 04.
- Wynne, John Huddleston. *The Prostitute, a Poem*. London, 1771. Accessed through *Eighteenth Century* microfilm collection, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA Reel 5377, No. 05.

Secondary Sources

- Andrew, Donna T. *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Barker-Benfield, G. J. *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Barney, Richard A. *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Brown, Kathleen M. *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Bullough, Vern L. "Prostitution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century England." In *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality During the Enlightenment*, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin, 61-74. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Burford, E. J. and Joy Wotton. *Private Vices—Public Virtues: Bawdry in London from Elizabethan Times to the Regency*. London: Robert Hale, 1995.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*. Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.
- Harvey, Arnold D. *Sex in Georgian England: Attitudes and Prejudices from the 1720s to the 1820s*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
- Henderson, A. R. "Female Prostitution in London, 1730-1830." Ph.D. diss., London University, 1992.
- Henderson, Tony. *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*. New York: Longman, 1999.
- Hill, Bridget. *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Hill, Bridget. *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.
- Hitchcock, Tim. *English Sexualities, 1700-1800*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

- Howson, Gerald. *The Macaroni Parson: A Life of the Unfortunate Dr. Dodd*. London: Hutchison, 1973.
- Hufton, Olwen. *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1550-1800*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995.
- Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- McKeon, Michael. "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (Spring 1995): 295-322.
- Nash, Stanley. "Prostitution and Charity: The Magdalen Hospital, a Case Study." *Journal of Social History* 17 (1984) 617-628.
- Porter, Roy. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Penguin, 1982.
- Schwartz, Richard B. *Daily Life in Johnson's London*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Spacks, Patricia Meyer. "Ev'ry Woman Is at Heart a Rake." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 8 (Autumn 1974): 27-46.
- Staves, Susan. "British Seduced Maidens." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14 (Winter 1980-1981): 109-134.
- Thompson, E. P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.
- Trumbach, Randolph. *Sex and the Gender Revolution. Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

VITA

Shannon Elayne Gillard, 129 Fletcher Rd., Westlake, LA 70669, received a Bachelor of Arts in history from McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana in May 2000. As an undergraduate, she majored in history and minored in French. She received a Master of Arts in history from Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas in August 2004. She is a member of Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society and Phi Sigma Iota International Foreign Language Honor Society.